THE POETRY AND PROSE OF ARCHIBALD AND JAMES K. BAXTER: LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON?

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Jennifer C. Johnston

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Jennifer Johnston

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Abstract

The literature of James K. Baxter features many thematic and stylistic parallels with that of his father, Archibald. The material used in this thesis, most of which is previously unpublished, will illustrate how this is apparent from the outset of James's literary career. Substantial use is also made of a personal interview conducted with James's brother, Terence.

Archie's unpublished work contains many expressions of his beliefs and principles, and attention to these is essential in order to achieve a better understanding, not only of his own literature, but also to appreciate how these beliefs came to be realised in James's verse from a very early period.

Archie's poetry, traditionally ignored by critical opinion, will be discussed in some detail, particularly in relation to theme and style. Much of his verse is Romantic, while the remainder is often an expression of pacifist or socialist beliefs. A significant amount of James's early verse reiterates these beliefs also, as the World War II period had a dramatic effect on him and coincided with the beginning of his literary career.

Archie's unpublished, factually based novel is important to this discussion as it is evidence that a tradition of ancestral mythology was well-established by previous Baxter generations. Therefore James, rather than beginning this mythology himself, as has been thought, actually had a substantial body of myth and legend at his disposal should he choose to use it. His posthumously published novel, *Horse*, is not only indebted to this legacy, but

also illustrates his conscious desire to make himself a part of that same mythology.

The extent and obvious nature of many literary parallels and similarities in work of Archie and James highlight the fact that, although much of Archie's material remains unpublished, it is a useful source for developing a greater understanding of James's literature.

Introduction

The Poetry and Prose of Archibald and James K. Baxter: Like Father, Like Son?

The literature of James K. Baxter has continued to generate considerable interest in both the literary and the wider public arenas despite his death almost thirty years ago at the age of forty-six. His verse is therefore probably among the best known of any New Zealand poet to date. Although his life and work have been the subject of many biographies in the past, the picture these texts have presented has never really been complete as not only have the origins of much of Baxter's work, particularly his juvenilia, remained largely unexplored, but also his verse has always been considered in isolation, and never in conjunction with the literature of his father, Archibald Baxter. New Zealand critical opinion has generally acknowledged Archie Baxter's autobiography, *We Will Not Cease* (5th ed. Auckland, Penguin Books, 1987), as his sole literary effort. However this is actually not the case as Archie did in fact write a substantial amount of poetry and prose, which, although it may have been largely ignored or forgotten, is preserved in the archives of the Hocken Library, Dunedin, together with the Baxter family papers.

The unpublished state of much of James's early verse and of Archie's literature has meant that the distinct thematic relationship existent between both of their writings has also been overlooked. However, when

James's verse, particularly that which was composed prior to 1944, is considered alongside the poetry and prose of his father, it becomes immediately apparent that Archie, and indeed the wider Baxter clan, were in fact far greater sources of literary inspiration for James than has traditionally been thought.

In the past several critics have already noted the general impact of Archie's quiet, dignified personality on everybody around him, and there is no question that the effect he had on his son was considerable. He was a remarkable and charismatic man who possessed very high personal principles and beliefs, many of which his family came to share. He was a pacifist and a conscientious objector during the First World War, and knew well what it was to be a marginalised figure at odds with much of society, as this was a time when many New Zealanders were extremely jingoistic, and pacifists were usually treated with intolerance and contempt. Archie was deported to the front lines in France by the New Zealand Government in 1917, so that he could undergo what they termed as the "process of conversion", which involved prolonged periods of severe mental anguish, torture, and near starvation. He remained undaunted however, and later, in 1939, published his autobiography describing this ordeal. The effect of Archie's steadfast beliefs and an awareness of his treatment during his time as a conscientious objector are factors that cannot be underestimated when discussing the literature of his son, as they were to impact heavily on James particularly during the crucially formative stages of his life.

The sparing criticism heretofore paid towards Archie's autobiography has tended to be confined to expressions of horror at his ordeal, or to a focus on the personality of Archie himself, rather than performing the task of actual literary criticism. This is a rather curious circumstance, particularly as

James himself regarded his father's literary ability with admiration and respect, and even included some of it in his own manuscript notebooks. Archie obviously favoured the work of the Romantic poets, and much of his verse is an attempt at such a style; and it is apparent that he was most comfortable with the ballad form. Despite James's appreciation of this work it must also be said, however, that some of Archie's poetry and prose is not of the highest quality—but given the short duration of his formal education, the inferior nature of some of his literature is perhaps to be expected. Nevertheless, the main focus of this current discussion will not really be concerned with the technical merits of the literature itself as such since the interest with Archie's literature lies not so much in what it is, but what it can reveal. This material not only allows a much fuller understanding of the atmosphere which would have surrounded the young Baxter during his childhood and adolescent years, but also draws attention to the undoubted existence of strong literary parallels of theme and style between the work of both father and son which remain constant throughout James's literary career, and whose origins can be traced back to this early period.

Pacifism is certainly the most obvious theme common to both Archie and James's work and one which, although apparent from James's boyhood verse, is a belief he revisited repeatedly in his poetry, even as an adult. The Second World War came at a crucial point in James's life, both at a personal and literary level—hence the precocious nature of his awareness of pacifism and pacifist thought. The wartime social climate emphasised to him the often cruel nature of injustice, instigated his distrust of authority, and developed a sense of the alienation he felt his ancestors must have experienced in the past. His brother, Terence, was imprisoned as a conscientious objector at this impressionable time, and James felt very keenly the enforced separation

from him. This is indeed an element which was to play an enormous part in James's changed outlook on life, apparent from the war period onwards.

It has already been observed by critics such as Paul Millar and Vincent O'Sullivan that events or circumstances important to James always came to be featured somehow in his verse, and this is especially true prior to, and during, the Second World War. As the majority of James's childhood and adolescent verse has remained unpublished it has not been possible to comprehend fully the impact the wartime social climate undoubtedly had on him. However, once a wider range of the material written at this time is taken into account, it is possible to gain a clearer insight into what must have often been a painful and anguished adolescence.

In the past it has been suggested that Archie, by the sheer nature of his personality, was a huge influence on his son's literary career—although such criticism still does not consider the literature of both father and son juxtaposed. The suggestion of a father/son literary relationship, and the notion of influence, is somewhat problematical and is one that cannot be made without referring to Harold Bloom's theory of influence which views the relationship between a poet and a precursor as an interrelated, angst-ridden struggle for imaginative space. Whether or not this theory is in fact a valid frame of reference for this particular father/son relationship is of course a moot point. As will be seen, although specific facets of Bloomist thought such as Oedipal impulses and the correlation of sex and death are certainly features of James's verse, Bloom's overall theory may perhaps be seen as more applicable to literary relationships experienced by James other than that which he shared with his father.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that a distinct relationship does exist between much of Archie and James's work, and this is particularly notice-

able with regards to the mythological nature of their writing. Traditionally it has been considered that James's imagination was caught by his Baxter ancestors and that his ability to mythologise them is a marked and unique feature of much of his verse. However, when Archie's unpublished material is viewed in conjunction with that of his son, it can been seen that a significant amount of James's work is indebted to a legacy of ancestral myth that was already rich in oral tradition and had strong foundations and roots in place, prior to James's writing of them.

While Archie's own attempt to celebrate these forebears in his unpublished novel includes many of the known facts surrounding the Baxter clan, the little attention that has been paid to this text has suggested that it is a work of fiction. Such a claim is rather misleading as the basic framework of the novel will be shown to be factual and illustrates not only that many of the myths and legends had actually surrounded the Baxter and McColl clans for generations, but also that their exploits had become deeply entrenched in the consciousness of their descendants. Archie's novel constantly interweaves fact and fiction, past and present together, reiterating old myths and creating new ones, and many of the figures he mentions in his novel reappear in various guises in his son's literature.

James's posthumously published novel, *Horse*, is a loosely autobiographical account, and it, too, reveals the extent to which his literature was dependent on this wealth of inherited mythology. He wrote of his ancestors as an integral part of himself, and there is no doubting the fact that a sense of affiliation with them was important to him, as he always considered himself as part of a tribe, whether it be Scottish or Maori. *Horse* is a work which allowed him to identify with, and see himself, as an active participant in the mythological and tribal processes, as he appropriated and altered existing

myths and made them part of his own. His act of writing of his ancestors is therefore an act of perpetuation as he continues a time-honoured tradition (as had Archie) of retelling the stories of his ancestors. However, a fuller understanding of the extent to which James K. Baxter's literature is indebted to his forebears cannot really be appreciated without firstly gaining an added insight into the life and literature of Archibald Baxter himself.

Chapter 1

Archie Baxter: The Man with the Iron Will

Amongst the Baxter family papers now held in the archives of the Hocken Library, Dunedin, are several collections containing Archie Baxter's personal correspondence, together with a body of his original poetry and prose, plus an unpublished novel. These papers are a valuable source of information as they allow a keen insight into a unique, and quite remarkable man, who had not only formed a particularly high set of personal beliefs and philosophies, but was prepared to uphold, and live by them, throughout his life. These beliefs are not only expressed in much of his unpublished poetry and prose, but as will be shown, they were also often realised in the literature of his son James. Thus it is essential, prior to any discussion taking place regarding the literature of either Baxter, father or son, to turn firstly to Archie himself. An increased understanding of the type of man he was, and an appreciation of his personal philosophies and beliefs, will reveal how a personality such as his could, and did, affect those around him to a quite unusual extent.

There is no doubt that Archie was different from the average person. His autobiography, *We Will Not Cease*, which is his account of his ordeal as a conscientious objector during World War I, demonstrates the lengths to which he was prepared to go in order to sustain his beliefs, even when faced with extreme adversity. W.H. Oliver claimed "he was one of those great souls utterly possessed by an idea and ready to pay any price for it" (*James K. Baxter: A Portrait* [Wellington, Port Nicholson Press, 1983], 10). Such

was Archie's fortitude in the face of severe, and lengthy, periods of mental strain and physical torture, that he was later reported to have possessed an "iron will and constitution" (*The Evening Star,* 17 February 1946, Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/197, Hocken Library, Dunedin).[1]

However, Archie did not consider himself as anything other than the average person. Despite this rather self-effacing attitude, he was a charismatic man who possessed some quite unique qualities, one of which was the ability to reason and to persuade those with whom he came into contact, often being able to bring them around to his way of thinking.

Archie's opinions, which the authorities could not subdue, were neither rash nor ill considered; they were in fact well thought-out and well reasoned. Apparently he was a man who always thought long and hard about a problem before making a decision. According to his son, Terence:

> he was one of those sort of slow thinking sort of people. He used to think things over a lot before he even made a move. He wouldn't go and say that 'this is right'. No, not him. He'd think it over quite a while...longer than most people, or longer...He'd think it over before he made a move.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

Archie's pacifism, as will be shown, is one illustration of the meticulous and careful way with which he would formulate his ideas before deciding on an eventual course of action.

[1] All subsequent archival material referred to in this thesis is sourced from the Hocken Library, Dunedin, unless expressly stated otherwise.

Archie was a person who generally related well to other people, and was, as Frank McKay states, a "quietly dignified man" who was seen to be "a natural leader, whose counsel was greatly valued inside and outside the family" (*The Life of James K. Baxter* [Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1990], 7). His status within his own family was such that, as Paul Millar claims, Archie was "the acknowledged leader of the Baxter clan" even while his father was still alive ("'Spark to a Waiting Fuse': James K. Baxter's Correspondence with Noel Ginn 1942-46" [PhD Thesis, Victoria University, 1996], 17).[2] In an interview with Millar Terence Baxter remembered how, "if there were any problems in the family [they would say] 'Oh, we'll have to see Archie about it.' Anything, anytime, over money or things like that...He seemed to lead his brothers" (*ibid*).

Archie's standing in the family, and the esteem with which he was held, is expressed in a letter his brother, Donald, sent to Archie shortly after he had returned from France. Donald, who still remained in Whitanui Reformatory, wrote: "This feeble pen of mine can never make you understand my feelings when I looked again at the old familiar signature; but never mind, the day is coming when ink on paper will not be needed between us, the day when I will again grip the clean hand that refused to be stained with the blood of its fellow man" (letter to Archibald Baxter, September 1918, Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/198).

Donald Baxter's presence in detention camp is, in itself, an illustration of how considerable Archie's powers of persuasion must have been, as he was often able to reason quietly and gently with people, and bring them around to his way of thinking. The spread of pacifism throughout the Baxter

[2] All subsequent references to research or publications by Paul Millar will be to this PhD. Thesis unless expressly stated otherwise.

clan is clear evidence of this ability. In his autobiography Archie states that when he initially decided to oppose the war he "ploughed a lonely furrow and for a long time did not even get the support of my own family. Gradually, however, they came to see there was something in what I said" (9). As Terence stated in Millar's interview, "this business over the war, it was my father that got the idea first...and he started to think things over. He must have had a fair bit of influence over his brothers" ('Spark to a Waiting Fuse' 17). Archie's wife, Millicent, also described in her own autobiography how "his own family at first thought his pacifism foolish...but Archie really worked it all out for himself, and convinced his family" (*The Memoirs of Millicent Baxter* [Whatamongo Bay, Cape Catley Ltd, 1981], 53). And convince them he did, as Harry Holland recorded, two of Archie's brothers, John and Alexander (Sandy), were ultimately deported on board the troopship *Waitemata* with him, while Donald served a prison sentence of almost three years in detention camp, and two other brothers, Hugh and William both served eleven months, also as conscientious objectors (*Armageddon or Calvary* [Brooklyn, H.E. Holland, 1919], 107). Terence remembers his father's empathetic nature well:

> He seemed to have ways of getting around people, he seemed to do that, which I don't know exactly how he did it, but he seemed to be able to do that... I don't think he went round trying to convert other people, or anything like that, he just talked to them and let them know what the facts were about something...and they could think it over for themselves. But he must've had a way of, of talking to other people...[He] was able to talk to people in a, sort of, close heart-to-heart sort of way.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

Archie's mild, empathetic manner was indeed a quality many people were obviously drawn to. In her *Memoirs* Millicent wrote of how she and Archie went door-knocking in order to gain support for a petition they had organised which opposed compulsory cadet training for boys aged between fourteen and eighteen years: "I took one side of the street, he took the other. I got five signatures, he got twenty five" (72).

Archie was well liked and respected in the Dunedin area, and according to Terence, women also admired him greatly—a circumstance Archie was not always entirely comfortable with:

> He had women admirers now and again. There were one or two that used to come to him...who used to come to his place. They used to wait 'til my mother went off to town, you see. Once they saw her off, so they'd be round to see him...and he didn't like it very much.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

Millicent also wrote of the attraction the opposite sex often felt towards Archie, commenting rather wryly that he "was always being approached by women—in Salisbury, in Paris, and elsewhere. I was never approached by anyone" (99).

Archie's innate nobility and strength of character were obvious to those who had not even met him, as many of the New Zealand public were to discover. On March 5 1918, when Archie was in France, he sensed his death was imminent, and sent the following letter to his parents:

> I have just time to send you this brief note. I am being sent up the lines tomorrow. I have not heard where Jack and Sandy are. As far as military service goes, I am of the same mind as ever. It is impossible for me to serve

> in the army. I would a thousand times rather be put to death and I am sure you all believe that the stand I take is right. I have never told you since I left New Zealand of the things I have passed through, for I knew how it would hurt you. I only tell you now, so that, if anything happens to me, you will know. I have suffered to the limit of my endurance, but I will never in my sane senses surrender to the evil power that has fixed its roots like a cancer on the world. I have been treated like a soldier who disobeys (No. 1 Field Punishment). That is hard enough at this time of year, but what made it worse for me was that I was bound to refuse military work, even as a prisoner. It is not possible for me to tell you in words what I have suffered. But you will be glad to know that I have met with a great many men who have shown me the greatest kindness. I know that your prayers for me are not in vain. I will pray for you all to the last; it is all I can do for you now. If you ever hear that I have served in the army or that I have taken my own life, do not believe that I did it in my sound mind. I never will...
>
> (qtd. in Holland 49)

Millicent Baxter claims in her book that, in 1918, her former governess, Janet Prosser, gave her a copy of this letter. It had been copied out by poet Blanche Baughan, who also sent it to the *Truth* newspaper which published it, and "raised something of a storm" (51-2). Millicent also stated that after reading the letter, she was so affected by it that she found she "began to look at things quite differently. It altered my whole outlook, on politics and everything in life" (51), and added that she simply "*had* to meet him [Archie]" (57). She was in fact to make several trips out to the Baxter family farm before she did finally meet the man she would eventually marry, as at the time Archie was often away working in Central Otago (*ibid* 58).

Archie's story did indeed touch many people. Among his papers in the

Hocken Library are many letters from people—often strangers—who admired his brave stance, or like Mrs Ada Weeber, had been "inspired" by his book which was one she frequently loaned out to others (letter to Archibald Baxter, 29 October 1943, Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/190). Another reader, A .M. Collins, claimed they would "treasure" it (letter to Archibald Baxter, 29 November 1942, Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/190), while others wrote to him asking for a copy of the book, as they had been unable to purchase it locally. Another letter is from Douglas Hay, a soldier who stood guard outside Archie's hut at Sling Camp, apologising for his wartime behaviour towards Archie (he states he had written earlier to Archie's fellow objector, Mark Briggs, doing the same). Hay goes on to say: "I am fairly sure that it was the example of you and your friends in 1917 that woke O.E.B. [Ormond Burton] up and set him on the Glory Road[3]...I know this for certain, that the events described in 'I [sic] Will Not Cease', mark a tremendous advance for New Zealand thinking, and will hold their place in history" (letter to Archibald Baxter, 26 March 1961, Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/190). Paul Millar, in his PhD Thesis, also mentions how Noel Ginn knew of Archie by reputation and had apparently regarded Archie as something of a "saint" before he had even met Terence (80). Such was the effect Archie seems to have had on others.

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[3] Ormond Burton fought as a soldier at Gallipoli during the First World War. He was decorated as a military hero and wrote of New Zealand military exploits at the time. He later became a pacifist and a Methodist Minister who publicly objected to the Second World War outside Parliament the day after war was declared in 1939. Burton was arrested, defrocked, and sent to Whitanui Reformatory, which was where Donald Baxter, during World War I, and Terence Baxter and Noel Ginn, during World War II, spent some of their sentences. During his confinement Burton was sent some verses written by two different people, both on the same day, asking for his opinion on them. One he tactfully declared did not have the makings of a poet, the other was "from a boy of sixteen, I could only say I was not competent to criticize work of such merit...the boy was James K. Baxter" (*The Life of James K. Baxter* 74).
Millar, however, disputes McKay's claim of Burton's imprisonment with Terence Baxter and Noel Ginn. See p 24 of " 'Spark to a Waiting Fuse': James K. Baxter's Correspondence with Noel Ginn 1942-46".

Terence Baxter still remembers his father's willingness always to help anybody or anything, and how he did not like to see any sort of suffering. Archie would not, apparently, even kill a pig in the accepted throat-slitting fashion of the day; he preferred to shoot it more humanely with one clean shot to the head, rather than cause the animal any further distress (personal interview, 13 June 2001). Archie's humanity is evident in all his writings. In *Armageddon or Calvary* he once wrote that "as a citizen I have regard for the thoughts and opinions of my fellows, and also for their feelings...I have my failings like other men, but I stand for Universal Brotherhood. I view all men as comrades and brothers" (76). As for the soldiers who assisted him through his wartime ordeal, he later stated: "my feeling towards them resembles a prayer that something good might always follow them, and that the light should shine upon them"; as for those who harmed him, he bore them no malice, realising they had been caught and had "become part of the military machine" (*We Will Not Cease*, fwd. n. pag.).

Thus, the basis of Archie's personal beliefs was simple. Although he was not a part of any organised religious sect for many years, he knew his Bible well.[4] Its teachings were important to him, and he sought to abide by them. Archie once wrote: "to me, Christianity is based on the Commandment: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'...and war cuts this position at its very roots" (*We Will Not Cease* 11). This principle, he stated, was in fact "the foundation of [his] philosophy" (*ibid* 110).

This concept of "love thy neighbour" was something he also passed on to both of his sons. Terence Baxter claimed one of his own objections to the Second World War, and the main reason why he was prepared to

[4] Archibald and Millicent Baxter both became Catholics in June 1965 (*The Memoirs of Millicent Baxter* 127).

be incarcerated in Detention Camp for its duration,

> was that...I wouldn't like to go along through life knowing that...I'd killed somebody else, ...or damaged somebody else. But all the same, that's just one side of it...The Bible come into it a certain amount...the Bible says 'thou shalt not kill'...but in wartime plenty of people...who knew the Bible said 'thou shalt not kill', but nevertheless they killed in war time, and the thing that was a little bit strange to me, especially, say, between Britain and Germany, they're both worshipping the same God...If you're there mixed up in the thing, you'd have different ideas then, though...only later on after you think it over, it comes back to you, the real thing that happened...and [you] don't feel too good about it.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

Terence's conscientious stance, and the time he spent in detention, obviously affected him greatly for many years afterwards, and, as can be seen, he still harbours quite ambivalent feelings of this period and of the stance he took. As Millar quotes in his thesis, Terence found the war period a confusing time,

> I'm still not happy about whether I made the right decision, or what was the right thing to do...You get in situations in war time where somebody might say, 'Oh, I couldn't kill another man.' But in a situation where it was either you or him you wouldn't be thinking about that at all, its [sic] out with the gun.
>
> (115)

Thus it would seem that one of Terence's concerns was exactly that which Archie had expressed earlier—that people could get caught in situations by the war machine, and would then later regret actions and decisions they

would never otherwise contemplate performing (*We Will Not Cease* 123). Although, as Millar illustrates, Terence maintained his conscientious stance of his own free will, and it was "based on a genuine conviction" (29), there is no doubt that it was a difficult decision for a young man who was aged only nineteen at the time. There is perhaps some suggestion that Terence did not think that he really had a great deal of choice in the matter, and that he was expected to follow Archie's, and indeed the wider Baxter clan's, example:

> In a way, in life, you're supposed to...bit of a problem, in a way, you're supposed to, sort of, honour your parents, a bit. My father thought the way he did. And if I went and joined up, or something like that, I could...see, in a way, that my father—even though, he wouldn't have to support me about it...But I would've, sort of, let him down.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

As Millar shows in his thesis, this was a dilemma Terence did indeed face as Terence's wife, Lenore, wrote:

> It could be said that he didn't have a choice—or that it was a Hobson's choice—as it was a matter of choosing to be rejected by Society or rejected by his family, as it would have been a great blow to his much beloved father if he had not taken a stand. I am not saying that the choice was not his nor that he did not sincerely believe in the principles he stood for...it was much harder for him.
>
> (18)

Undoubtedly pacifism and passive resistance were complex issues, and ones

which were to affect both Terence and James in different ways throughout their lives. Although James, at one time in a letter to Lawrence Baigent, denied his acceptance of this principle, saying: "the christian [sic] basis of *Love your neighbour* does not seem essential to me" (12 October 1945, MS 699, Macmillan Brown Library, Christchurch), his later behaviour would suggest otherwise. For example, once James had joined Alcoholics Anonymous and became a reformed alcoholic, he worked long and hard to help other alcoholics overcome their own problems. He also tried to set up Narcotics Anonymous to help recovering addicts, and often visited people in jail. Terence still recalls how James had often visited prisoners, and how sometimes people had approached him much later in life and told him of how his brother Jim had helped them through their problems and enabled them to turn their lives around (personal interview, 13 June 2001). Terence also remembers how Archie had often tried to help people during the Depression, knowing that:

> Some of them would do something, in desperation for their family, that wasn't altogether honest. They wouldn't do it normally, but they had, they did that to try to make ends meet sometimes. And he [Archie] could see the situation, more or less, why they did that. Not that he approved of what they were doing, but he tried to sort of help, or see them about it.
>
> (*ibid*)

There was, however, more to Archie's anti-war stance than just "doing unto others." In the foreword of the latest edition of his autobiography he claimed his objections were also aimed at what he termed as the "military machine." He also stated that at the time he took his stance he was

aware that, in placing himself in opposition to the "machine", he had to accept "the possibility that one may be physically destroyed by it"(fwd. n. pag.). He felt his fight to be not one "against individuals, but against systems and conventions" that held the evil together (*ibid* 110).

Archie's dispute with Sir James Allen, the then Minister of Defence, highlights how he considered the "machine" functioned in order to sustain itself. Frank McKay's biography details how, after Archie had returned from war, Allen publicly sought to discredit him. At this time conscientious objectors were increasingly gaining public sympathy as details of their harsh treatment were beginning to emerge. Archie's case was already well known before he returned and, as already mentioned, he was given relatively favourable press through the *Truth* newspaper, which at the time treated pacifists quite sympathetically (10). At about the same time as his return an inquiry into the maltreatment of conscientious objectors at Wanganui Detention camp had ruled in the objectors' favour.[5] Millicent also remembered how she had read with astonishment the headlines in *The Press* which stated 'Dreadful Cruelties Proved' (53). In order to silence growing public criticism Allen published an article in the *Otago Daily Times,* which was, as McKay claims in his biography, the most widely-read newspaper in Archie's area (10). In it Allen stated: "It appears from his [Archie's] own letters that he has persistently disobeyed orders, and if he has suffered any disability involving mental derangement, whether the degree of the derangement be great or small, the disability is the natural outcome of his consistently setting up his will in opposition to the will of the

[5] This report was written 21st September 1918 by Magistrate J. George L. Hewitt. For a full account of the report see 'The Magisterial Report' pp 134-43 in H.E. Holland's *Armageddon or Calvary* (Brooklyn, H.E. Holland, 1919).

community"("Baxter Case - The Conscientious Objector." *Otago Daily Times*, 24 Oct. 1918: 6 [microfiche]). Allen also went on to claim that Archie was suffering from "melancholia." According to an article Paul Baker wrote which appeared in the *Listener* three years ago, Sir James Allen was apparently unaware of the real extent of the treatment conscientious objectors suffered at the time: "a desk soldier, he was...oblivious to the possibility that soldiers at the front might wish, or feel obliged, to reform objectors by brutality. He issued no instructions to protect the objectors, and sought no reports on them, until it was too late...years, later he met Mark Briggs [a fellow objector of Archie's] and offered him a sincere and unequivocal apology" ("Prisoners of Conscience", 25April 1998: 70). When I asked Baker for the source of this information, and whether Allen's apology was a general one intended for all objectors, or if it was aimed specifically at Briggs alone, he replied: "The source of the comment was an interview with Briggs' daughter Joan Hornibrook made nearly 20 years ago. The apology was certainly made to Briggs alone, but I think the spirit of it could have included the others" (letter to author, 17 September 2001).

Archie's reply to Sir James Allen's article was published the next year in *Armageddon or Calvary*, where he defended his stance, stating he felt he had been "doing what I believed to be right, and refusing to do what I believed to be wrong; and I do not believe that all that was done to me and to other Objectors was done by the will of the community" (87). However, as McKay states in *The Life of James K. Baxter,* the "military machine" required military courage to be recognised in order to secure its own continuity, as opposed to Archie's stance, however brave it may have been (11).

Archie, however, did not enjoy talking, or writing, of his wartime experience. Terence is still able to recall his father's reluctance:

> He didn't want to talk about it, altogether, his experience...to my mother very much, or the family. So, if he didn't want to talk to her, about it... he probably didn't talk to us very much about it either...My mother had a bit of say in it [Archie's autobiography] because she had to get at him, hammer at him, to get him...to talk about what...happened to him ...in the war. He didn't want to talk, he didn't, he kept fairly quiet...he didn't want to bring these things back to mind. Definitely, they must've, in a way, in his mind, must've hurt him fairly deeply, that these things, this had happened in his life...Just the same...as many other men who had been in the act of war...they would never tell their wives about it.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

Archie himself confirmed Terence's impression as he wrote in his autobiography of how he found his experiences "hard to write of even now" (146). Millicent herself also reinforces Terence's statement as she tells in her *Memoirs* of the times, when Archie was dictating his story to her, how she would often complain to him that he was only giving her "the bare bones" of a narrative (82). She wanted him to show more feelings, to which he replied " 'Surely if I give them the facts, people can use their imaginations' "(*ibid*).

Writing of his wartime experiences was undoubtedly difficult for Archie, as "all my instincts are against putting such things before the public" (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/194/10). Nevertheless he did overcome his natural reserve as he considered "it is my duty, knowing of them, to let others know" (*ibid*), and thus proceeded to illustrate his many other objections to war which were based on a raft of socialist and humanitarian reasons. His book was therefore "an indictment of the whole military system, [to show] that absolute supremacy of the state from which springs[s]

all systems of government [is] based on complete disregard of the individual" (*ibid*). He based this theory on his opinion that war demanded "unquestioning obedience" of people and caused them to act in a manner which, in peacetime, would be abhorrent to them (*We Will Not Cease* 123). As already mentioned, this was a dilemma Terence also pondered over.

Archie was opposed to the entire military system, and in particular, to the implementation of conscription. Conscription, he considered, was a further added evil of the war machine. He felt that the act of conscription removed the last vestiges of individual liberty and forced people to commit "mass murder" (*ibid*). Amongst his papers in the Hocken Library are several copies of what are obviously notes for a prepared speech where he wrote:

> under conscription a State has dictatorial powers over the lives and liberties of the people to such an extent that they find themselves practically disfranchised...when we allow ourselves to be conscripted we surrender to others the powers of life and death which should always remain in our own hands.
>
> ("Conscription",
> Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196: 1, ts)[6]

Archie also believed "that a man should seek to bring his life and actions into agreement with his truest sense of duty towards God and Man" (Holland 76). Thus, according to Archie, as God is perfect, "the soul of Man is not, and cannot be, subject to any earthly State, for no earthly State is

[6] There are several copies of this particular article amongst Archie Baxter's private papers, all altered slightly. Two such pieces he has assigned the same title, "Conscription," one of which is in MS 975/196 and is a typescript, the other is in MS 975/197, which is in hand-written form. A third piece is also in the MS 975/197, but is untitled. As this piece is not formally documented as part of a numeric system no specific identifier, other than the manuscript collection number, can be given. It is more than likely that the typewritten piece in MS 975/196 is the final draft for all of the similar manuscript notes.

perfect" (*ibid*). Therefore, by extension, the implementation of conscription then forced the individual to be subject to the imperfect state; a situation which was at odds with Archie's beliefs.

Because Archie believed that no person could be subject to the earthly State, he was then resolute in his opinion that no person (or Appeal Board) had the right to judge another for their beliefs. Such was his conviction that the state could not have absolute right or power to judge an individual's right of conscience, that had he been summoned to appear before an Appeal Board for an exemption prior to his incarceration, he would not have done so, as he "did not consider that any Board had the right to be judge of a man's sincerity" (*We Will Not Cease* 11). The Appeal Boards were therefore, in Archie's opinion, "farcical" (*ibid*). According to Millar Noel Ginn was of the same mind regarding the appeal boards, and likewise for him, an appearance before one was "never an option" (24). When Ginn was sentenced in the criminal court for ignoring his call up orders, he pleaded 'Not Guilty'. When asked by the magistrate why he had pleaded so when Ginn had obviously refused to answer his orders, he replied he did not think he was "fundamentally guilty because of [his] beliefs" (*ibid* 24-5).

Archie's socialist beliefs were wide-ranging and he considered them to go hand-in-hand with his pacifism (*We Will Not Cease* 9). He was of the opinion that the people of the world did not generally want war; that they preferred, and could, live in relative harmony. He also considered the words of many politicians to be paradoxical to the actions they advocated: "Our statesmen have declared that war is futile, that it settles nothing and is a crime against all humanity. Yet those statesmen want conscription in order that all our fit young men may be trained to kill. Conscription and rearmament are preparations for war not peace" ("Conscription", Archibald McColl

Baxter Papers, MS 975/197: 2, ms).[7] He also believed that if the people of various countries were to unite and harness their collective strength, they would then have the ability to force governments to solve their problems in a more peaceable manner, through negotiation (*We Will Not Cease* 108). The workers, Archie felt, were pawns in a power game, and were often incited into hatred of one another to suit particular State purposes. He cited the "ridiculous arguments" of one Adjutant who tried to persuade him to relinquish his conscientious stance by telling him that the German people were "a great deal worse than lions and tigahs [sic]. So you need have no scruples whatever about killing them" (*ibid* 82). Such preposterous notions, Archie considered, were fed to the people in order to gain either side mass support. In another set of notes regarding conscription he claimed: "conscription, rearmaments, hate propaganda, enslave, crush and bewilder the people. They are only devices of the war-mongers who keep the people in bondage" (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/197, ms).[8] He also wrote in his notes that "the great war [sic] was a clash of rival imperialisms" ("Conscription", Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/197: 4, ms). He further stated in his autobiography that simply because "the imperialists and financiers had fallen out [this] was no reason why the workers should be led into war to blow the souls out of one another" (137).

Neither did Archie consider the old adage of war as a means of ensuring "the survival of the fittest" as anything but a myth. It may, he considered, be a fair and natural assumption with regards to the animal kingdom (as already seen with the Adjutant's "lions and tigahs"); but humans, he felt, had advanced beyond this to the point where the advent of war only ensured

[7] See footnote on p 21 above for source clarification.
[8] See footnote on p 21 above for source clarification.

that "many of the world's fittest and best men are slain, while a still greater number are rendered unfit" (Holland 75). Archie questioned how "any person who knows the destruction, the degradation, the misery, and the sorrow caused by war, can regard it as anything else than diabolical in the extreme" (*ibid* 75-6).

Archie also believed that if any side was to achieve a decisive victory in war (and history was later to prove him right), future peace could never be ensured for all nations as various governments claimed it would; rather it would sow "the seeds of future wars" (*We Will Not Cease* 123). Peace, he felt, could never be achieved by nations arming themselves with superior weaponry in order to deter the aggressiveness of other nations. Lasting peace, he considered, could only be achieved through a process of reciprocal understanding ("Conscription", Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/197: 3-4, ms). This understanding, he also wrote, must be assisted by a concerted effort to remodel a world economy and financial system that had failed to adjust over the years to technological change. He suggested there were ample resources and raw materials for all nations of the world, and that all people must work together towards ensuring a fair economic restructuring in order to achieve world peace: "Our economic structure must be remodelled and adjusted both in its internal and international aspect to meet the changing conditions and to suit the instinctive and natural urge towards unity" (*ibid* 3-4).

As can be seen Archibald Baxter had a set of strongly formulated, and wide-ranging opinions regarding not only war, but also life in general, which drew on several areas of popular pacifist, socialist, and religious belief. He was not an impulsive man; he thought very carefully before he acted, but once he had formed a belief he became, as Frank McKay wrote in

his biography, "indomitable"(10), as the right to uphold and preserve these beliefs Archie considered to be an integral part of his being. His natural charisma and the manner with which he related to others undoubtedly attracted many people towards both himself and his beliefs. He possessed the ability to express these philosophies well, and had obvious powers of reasoning and persuasion, as can be seen by the entire Baxter clan's embracing of pacifism. Thus, in the context of this thesis, which is concerned primarily with a father/son relationship, a strong personality, such as that of Archie, was bound to affect those around him to a more than usual degree—a circumstance that will soon become apparent in the following chapters which will discuss the poetry and prose of his son.

Chapter 2

Archie Baxter: "Brother Bard"

Traditionally Archie Baxter has been recognised by New Zealand literary circles as the man who not only inspired his son, James, to write poetry, but who also made a sole contribution to the field of arts and letters with his autobiography, *We Will Not Cease*. Although Archie's love of verse has always been well documented, it is not generally well known, and indeed it is quite rare to find any reference to the fact, that he did also write verse himself, and that these efforts have been preserved, along with the rest of the Baxter family papers, in the Hocken Library. The fact that this material is usually ignored is difficult to understand, given that not only is access to the Archie Baxter papers unrestricted, but also that the early, and restricted, James K. Baxter manuscript notebooks—a favourite haunt of many of his biographers—also contain some of Archie's verse. This fact in itself should indicate that James must have considered that his father's work did have a place, and did indeed deserve to be viewed, alongside his own.

There is an undoubted paralleling of theme and style evident between the verse of both Archie and James which, as their work has never been considered in conjunction, has hitherto remained unnoticed. However once Archie's verse is taken into account, it is apparent that much of the pacifism and the Romanticism which are particular features of James's early verse were in fact initially inspired by the poetry and beliefs of his father.

Past references to Archie's love of literature have been fairly typical. W.H. Oliver's biography at the time of its publication, was described by

Trevor James in *Landfall* as a "very fine book...[that] makes Baxter accessible as a person for the first time...[which] as we should expect from a professional historian...embeds Baxter in a rich social context" (vol. 38, no. 3, September 1984: 352-3). Despite such acclaim Oliver's "rich social context" does in fact, merely say of Archie's poetic leanings, that he was an "often silent man, but poetry was close to his heart" (24). Charles Doyle, in his biography, describes James's notebooks in the Hocken Library, but ignores the fact that some of these notebooks also contain verse written by Archie. Doyle does also mention that James did indeed echo many of his father's themes, but then fails to point out that Archie wrote of them in verse form also (*James K. Baxter* [Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1976], 37-8). Frank McKay pays closer attention in his biography to Archie and his work, describing him as a man who "enlivened many a gathering of family and friends with poetry delivered in a soft West Highlands voice" (7). McKay also acknowledges that Archie did write poetry himself and does mention the fact that some verse and an unpublished novel (which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter) are now held in the Hocken Library. McKay describes this verse as "mostly derivative nature verse in the Romantic tradition" and adds that there are also "a couple of lively squibs"(*ibid*). There is no doubt that McKay is at pains to present Archie favourably as he suggests, somewhat diplomatically, that:

> Archie was undoubtedly a poet and a visionary. Today it is often implied that the distinguishing mark of a poet is technical accomplishment. Vision is correspondingly undervalued. Archie, in his life, is an instance of the observable phenomenon that many people who do not write verse, or who do not write it well, have deeper and more delicate insights into what is central

in human experience.

(*ibid*)

Despite whatever a more modern society may, or may not, think of this verse, Archie's poetic ability was, undoubtedly, admired and appreciated by his family. His youngest brother, Hugh, wrote to him on two separate occasions addressing him as "Brother Bard" and referring to himself as "Brother of the Bard" (7 September 1913; 26 September 1913, Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/190). James also admired his father's verse and, according to Millar, did try to help Archie find a publisher for it (e-mail to author, 6 February 2001). Terence Baxter also states that he in fact prefers his father's poetry to that of his brother, which was often too complicated for his own taste and did not usually rhyme (personal interview, 13 June 2001).

One of the more recent studies is Paul Millar's PhD thesis, "'Spark to a Waiting Fuse': James K. Baxter's Correspondence with Noel Ginn 1942-46", and is the most comprehensive work, to date, as regards Archie's verse. Millar refers not only to Archie and his poetry, but also includes some of this unpublished verse in his thesis appendices.

However, apart from the work of McKay and Millar, the scant attention that has heretofore been paid to Archie's verse is, as can be gleaned from McKay's tactful description, probably due to the quality of the verse itself. However, this does not mean that Archie's poetry is without value; as Millar suggests in his thesis: "Baxter's start as a poet was largely due to his father, and Archibald Baxter *must* be seen as the strongest influence acting on his son at this time" (74). Therefore it is important to determine as accurately as possible the nature and the extent of this influence, and closer at-

tention to Archie's verse will assist in this area. Millar further states:

> To my mind, the great value of Baxter's correspondence with Ginn is the very fact that it relates principally to [the] adolescent phase, because I see this period as providing, both critically and biographically, the key to full understanding and appreciation of his later life and poetry. Baxter returns to adolescence in his writing time and again for the remainder of his life.
>
> (*ibid* 7)

Although Millar does acknowledge that the first six of James's notebooks contain many thematic parallels with Archie's beliefs, (Millar claims he counted ninety-four out of three hundred and eighty-seven of James's poems as being overtly pacifist, as were many others by implication [74-5]), he does not really consider James's boyhood phase as being as important to his poetic development, as the later stage of adolescence. While I agree with much of what Millar says, it is my opinion that the key to the understanding he refers to, comes at an even earlier period than he suggests. A fuller understanding of James's work must take into account his juvenilia as this is the period when issues, especially pacifism, were to impinge dramatically on his consciousness. This earlier period was a time when not only did he develop an increased awareness of the circumstances of his father's conscientious objection, but it was also a period when James was to become more sensitive to a changed and hostile social climate as the threat of war loomed once more.

In order to establish the extent to which this early period affected James, and prior to any discussion of his poetry taking place, it is necessary to consider firstly Archie's poetry in some detail, as the origins of specific

thematic and stylistic features common to the poetry of both Baxter father and son, will become readily apparent. However, caution is needed when considering all of the material held in these archival collections as Archie, who obviously admired the work of many other poets, often copied out and kept various other pieces of verse that appealed to him, and these are also now included alongside his own work. For example, apart from several anonymous pieces written in a poetic style and handwriting that is clearly not Archie's, there is an excerpt from Shelley, as well as three pieces of verse composed by Noel Ginn. Usually Archie was quite meticulous and initialled his own work, but this was not always the case. Thus, as authentication of all material available has not been possible, this discussion remains concerned only with poems that have either been signed by Archie, or of which there can be no doubt that the composition is his—that is to say, if a piece contains passages which have obviously been worked and reworked in Archie's own handwriting, thereby indicating the composition to be his own.

As McKay rightly states, much of Archie's verse was indeed Romantic. It is also well known that the poet Archie particularly delighted in was Robert Burns. Indeed he quoted "Tam o' Shanter" so often to his sons that James claimed he knew it by heart by the time he was six years old (*The Man on the Horse* [Dunedin, University of Otago Press, 1967], 91). As Millar relates, this was indeed a circumstance Terence Baxter clearly remembers: "he [Archie] used to get my brother on his knee and recite one of Burns's poems—one of his favourite ones was of course 'Tam O' Shanter', and my brother would take it all in" (36). Such was Archie's admiration of Burns that he composed a poem entitled "Burns" in which he extols the Scottish bard's skill:

To such a man a tribute would I pay—
To Robert Burns; and well we know that none
Of Scotland's sons of genius with all their arts
Him touched like him the finest chords of human hearts.

His living lyre to nature ever true
Awakes such echoes in the hearts of men
As bid their souls aspire to dare and do
And nobly play their part in life: and when
To love he tuned its strings how well he knew
The master touch...

("Burns",
James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/10)

The semantic awkwardness of the last line of the first stanza, "him touched like him," has been preserved as it appears in the original notebook. However, it is unlikely that this reads quite as Archie had intended at the time, as according to Terence Baxter, Archie hardly ever wrote any of his verse down; he just remembered poems, even those he had composed many years before, and recited them (personal interview, 13 June 2001).[9] James wanted to record this verse before Archie had forgotten his poems completely and therefore transcribed some of his father's poetry into the notebooks now held in the Hocken Library. As already mentioned, Millar states James also he tried to secure a publisher for these efforts. (e-mail to author, 6 February 2001). Some other pieces he typed on to loose sheets of paper and these remain with the other collections of Archie's material in the Hocken Library.

[9] As Terence Baxter made this comment to me prior to the commencement of our interview proper it does not appear on the tape or transcript.

Thus, the awkward line is probably a simple transcriptional error, as Archie, with his frequent oral recitations, would have easily noticed such an obvious error in the delivery.

While the "Burns" poem is, as Archie says, his attempt to pay tribute to the Scottish bard, he has written another poem, which although not so overt in its admiration of Burns, is perhaps a more fitting tribute, as with this particular poem Archie manages to capture some essential Burnsian qualities. Archie's poem is "The Vision", part of which appears in James's tenth notebook. The entire poem is to be found, however, amongst Archie's own papers. Burns, incidentally, also wrote a poem of the same name; and while it, too, relates an otherworldly experience, it is, as Mary Ellen Brown suggests, a work which is concerned primarily with Scottish nationhood (*Burns and Tradition* [London, MacMillan Press, 1984], 7). Archie's poem differs in that, although it has quite distinct parallels with Burns's "Tam o' Shanter", it was also in some way no doubt inspired by Archie's own mystical experiences. As Oliver observes, this was a phenomenon not unfamiliar to Archie: "he was, at times, given to hearing voices and receiving messages" (24). According to Millicent Baxter, several deceased people used to regularly contact her husband in an extra-sensory manner, even people he had never met. This was an experience to which he apparently became quite accustomed (62-3). Frank McKay, in his biography, also tells of a time shortly before Archie's father's death when Archie believed he saw the figure of one of his ancestors come and lie down beside the dying man in order to "help his father over" (7).

The sense that Archie's poem is a pastiche of Burns is apparent from the outset, as Burns's poem begins thus:

When chapman billies leave the street,
And drouthy neebors neebors meet;
As market-days are wearing late,
An' folk begin to tak the gate;
While we sit bousing at the nappy,
An' getting fou and unco happy
.....
The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter;
And ay the ale was growing better:
.....
The storm without might rair and rustle,
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle...

(*The Complete Poems and Songs of Robert Burns* 180-1)

Archie's poem begins with a similar setting, a gathering of friends drinking and having a good time together which lasts well into the night while a storm rages outside:

At Jimmie's hut we had all met[10]
The night was wintry wild and wet
But what cared we about the weather
We knew when thus we met together
An extempore from Charley's lyre
Could rouse a grand poetic fire...

("The Vision",
Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

[10] See p 152 below regarding the original wording of this line.

As can be seen, Archie uses the same octosyllabic couplets and iambic tetrameter as Burns, even changing to pentameter as the poem progresses—as does "Tam" on occasion. Archie thus achieves the same singsong rhythm and pace usually associated with the ballad and Burns. As has been noted by Brown, Burns used local experience and traditions to set his work in very specific situations in order to draw attention to particular issues (58-65). He was also apparently adept at using existing poems or folk-stories, either written or oral, and incorporating them into his own work (*ibid* 49). Archie also achieves a similar atmosphere as he uses the existing material of Burns and alters it to suit his own purposes, thereby establishing a local setting and highlighting local issues in true Burnsian fashion. The scene in "The Vision" is a "hut", thus the reader, or listener, realises immediately they are in a working class environment. Archie also comments on the general displeasure at local laws that stated when such gatherings should take place:

> Our favourite bards received our loud applause
> Our friendship glowed despising man-made laws
> That regultates [sic] the hours when men shall meet
> And part, if they are to be deemed discreet.
> By those who are too prudent e'er to know
> Those powers that must uninterrupted flow.
>
> ("The Vision")

The poem moves on at a steady pace, pushing the reader along with it, as it creates a sense of the inevitable climax, which of course can occur only at the "witching hour". Like Tam, who must ride when "That hour, o'night's black arch the key-stane" arrives, the folk gathered at Jimmie's hut find the

" 'wee short hour' was all but gone", and just as Tam sees a vision of witches and warlocks dancing at Kirk Alloway, an apparition appears before those assembled at the hut—the "glaming form" of Robbie Burns.[11] In a reversal of the traditional bawdy reveller Burns is normally portrayed as, Archie gives his poem a rather humorous twist, as he changes his particular phantom into a grave and sober character:

> James offerd [sic] him a beer but he refused.
> So next he offered him a whisky neat
> Which he declined, and said 'I've ne'er been boozed
> On earthly drink, nor tasted earthly meat,
> Now friend I think your comrades you've amused
> I pray you press no farther on this beat',
> To which James curled his lip and gave a curse
> And said 'If you are Burns you've altered for the worse.'
>
> ("The Vision")

The spirit of Burns then alters to become a succession of "favourite bards", such as Byron, Hood, Shelley, Goldsmith, and Shakespeare. There is no doubt Archie's "Vision" is a pastiche of Burns with its rhyming couplets and use of the local vernacular. The rhythm and pace of the poem demonstrate Archie's awareness of metrical form and structure, and show his ability to

[11] There could be some debate over the term "glaming", as it could be a misspelling of "gleaming" as occasionally Archie's work does contain spelling mistakes. However, it is my opinion that he did intend it to be "glaming", an archaic Scottish variant of "glamour", meaning magic spell or charm, particularly concerning the occult. According to the *Dictionary of Scottish Language*, "glamer" is defined as "the supposed influence of a charm on the eye, causing it to see objects differently from what they really are" (Edinburgh, Willam P. Nimmo, 1867: 231). This meaning would undoubtedly be more in keeping with the supernatural imagery of this particular verse.

manipulate sound. The line quoted earlier, "The night was wintry wild and wet", uses alliteration of 'w' sounds to create an image of a stormy tempest. Further on, as other poets appear to those assembled at the hut, a sense of languor is evoked with the use of long vowel sounds and soft consonants: "Shakespeare, serene, deep, dreamy, and enthralling."

The ballad was obviously a medium Archie liked to work with, as another of his poems "Simon's Town" illustrates. According to Millar, this poem was inspired by the time Archie spent in South Africa en route to Europe during World War I (e-mail to author, 6 February 2001). Despite the actual circumstances of his presence in South Africa, Archie did have quite pleasant memories of the country; it was a period he later described in his autobiography as one of "respite" (70-1).[12] He also recorded in some detail his impressions of the surrounding countryside and the people he encountered during this period, particularly those at Simon's Town (*ibid*).

The poem itself consists of five ten-line stanzas which alternate between iambic trimeter and tetrameter—often a feature of the ballad. Not only is a set rhyme scheme used, but the third, seventh, and ninth lines of each stanza also feature an internal rhyme scheme. The first stanza will suffice as an example:

> Once more toward the western sea
> The glorious sun goes down,
> Once more he *fires* the granite *spires*
> That look o'er Simon's Town.

[12] Several prisoners contracted severe cases of measles on board the *Waitemata,* the troopship they were deported on. It made a port stop at Capetown where the worst cases, one of whom was Archie Baxter, were taken off the ship and left behind to recover in South Africa for some weeks. Conditions on the *Waitemata* were obviously substandard as the ship was "condemned by the South African authorities as unfit for the transport of troops" (*We Will Not Cease* 60-1).

I watched him when at break of day
He rose with blood-red plume:
With shafts of *light* on many a *height*
He smote the shades of gloom
Where far and *wide* on every *side*
The heath and heather bloom.

("Simon's Town",
Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196 [emphasis added])[13]

The quite meticulous rhyme scheme of "Simon's Town," together with the more flowing ballad structure of "The Vision," illustrate how aware Archie was of poetic conventions. Certainly, he knew how to make language "work", and did possess some skill with verse, despite the fact that he did not have the benefit of an extensive formal education, as he had had to leave school at the age of twelve.

There is no doubt that Archie did admire the Romantic poets and often drew his inspiration from them. It is also apparent that many of his verses do contain expressions of the pacifist beliefs that were close to his heart. These beliefs were foundational to Archie; thus pacifism and a desire for peace were not merely a poetic theme he emulated in the Romantic style: such values were an essential, and indeed integral, part of his nature. One such poem which had obvious meaning and relevance to him was Shelley's "Ambition, Power, and Avarice" as, at some stage, Archie had copied out the second stanza as well as part of the third of this verse, a copy of which

[13] There are several copies of this poem in MS 975/196. It is also included in the tenth of James K Baxter's notebooks, MS 704-A/10.

can be found amongst his private collection. Shelley's poem begins thus:

> Ambition, power, and avarice, now have hurled
> Death, fate, and ruin, on a bleeding world.
> See! on yon heath what countless victims lie,
> Hark! what loud shrieks ascend through yonder sky;
> .....
> Oppressors of mankind, to *you* we owe
> The baleful streams from whence these miseries flow;
> For you how many a mother weeps her son,
> Snatched from life's course ere half his race was run!
>
> (*The Poems of Shelley* 115-7)

The overt nature of the pacifist sentiment expressed in this poem obviously appealed to Archie, and it seems to have inspired a poem of his own composition, "Loud calls the Voice of Reason", a copy of which can also be found in James's third notebook. Quite distinct parallels can be drawn between this poem and the Shelley piece, as Archie's poem contains the lines:

> Pride, Avarice, Ambition,
> Have plunged the world in war
> And writ their names in gore
> Darkness and Superstition,
> The horrors of the Past
> No blacker page reveal
> With wounds no balm can heal.
>
> ("Loud calls the Voice of Reason", Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

This poem has a set rhyme scheme which remains constant for all three stanzas. The final stanza is reminiscent of a sermon:

> But through the orient portals
> The world's true conqueror comes
> Without the beat of drums—
> "Peace and Goodwill to mortals!"
> The message was of old,
> Is now, and shall be
> Till all Mankind are free.
>
> ("Loud calls the Voice of Reason")

Although this poem is predominantly in iambic trimeter, Archie uses the stronger stress of spondaic feet and a more hieratic style of language to create an impression of a minister pounding on a pulpit. The poem begins with an iambic foot: "Loud calls the voice of Reason." The sense of a pounding type rhythm continues with the second stanza which begins with a spondee: "Pride, Avarice, Ambition"; while the line "The world's true conqueror comes" has a spondee with "world" and "true", which is then followed by the dactylic "conqueror." Further stress is created with alliteration of harsh sounding "c" consonants in "conqueror comes." Shelley's poem, condemning monarchs who willingly sacrificed the lives of their subjects in order to gain power or prestige, displays a sentiment which Archie agreed with wholeheartedly. He once stated "all systems of government [are] based on complete disregard of the individual" (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/194/10, ms). As has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, Archie was a man who adhered strongly to his principles and beliefs, what-

ever the personal cost. Therefore, although this particular poem may seem to be merely imitative of its Shelleyean predecessor, it would be unrealistic to expect beliefs such as these, which became life-long to Archie, not to be reflected somehow within any of the poetry he wrote.

Another pacifist poem, "O my Brothers", is extremely overt in its content. It is, however, a fair summary of the social pacifist beliefs Archie wrote of with such conviction in *Armageddon or Calvary*, in which he stated he believed all humanity to be part of a "universal brotherhood" (76). This poem has also been transcribed into the third of James's notebooks. The first stanza of the poem is a good illustration of these social pacifist values:

> O my brothers! O my brothers!
> Will ye be for ever slaves?—
> See your fathers and your mothers
> Sinking down into their graves,
> Ground by toil and crushed by sorrow
> While the flag of Mammon waves!
>
> ("O my Brothers",
> Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

Poems such as "O my Brothers" and "Loud calls the Voice of Reason" are an indication that Archie, like Burns, felt poetry to be a useful form of protest. Mary Ellen Brown claims Burns's "selection of detail is not random: elements were specifically chosen to make a point" (11). The same description also applies to much of Archie's work. There is no doubt that themes such as individual freedom and universal brotherhood were causes close to his heart, and he sought to uphold and promote them always; poetry was one

way in which he obviously felt he could do so.

However, Archie's verse was not always serious in nature; one of the "lively squibs" McKay refers to in his book must surely be the poem "Protest to the Taieri County Council." This is a rather entertaining, light-hearted verse written on behalf of a Mr John McCleary, objecting to a planned road through his farm:

In all these gullies I've made bridges
From great trees split by maul and wedges
I've mowed the fern from off the ridges
To get pig-bedding,
And with great care have nurtured hedges
Around my steading.

My sheds I've built with greatest pains,
And laid them off with paths and drains-
They're roofed with thatch and native cains
Well laced with flax
To shield my stock and keep the rains
From off their backs.

But woe is me my fate is hard,
For all my toil here's my reward,
Right through the cowshed in my yard
A full chain broad –
My foes agree with one accord
To make a road...

("Protest to the Taieri County Council",
Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

The language Archie uses in this poem gives it a very local flavour, and the poet illustrates how aware he is of the everyday issues that faced the people, much as Burns shows in his verse. Words such as "gullies", "fern", "shed", "flax", and "cowshed", combine to suggest a very particular New Zealand setting and also demonstrate a sound local knowledge of the area and its customs. There are several other short verses amongst Archie's material that also highlight how effective he thought poetry could be as a useful form of protest, one of which is "Gorse":

Gorse, gorse, gorse, gorse,
Shelter of rabbit and cow and horse,
Of great annoyance to farmers a source
When inspectors come round and compel them by force
On the shortest of notice to clear all their gorse.

Furze, furze, furze, furze,
To clear it the farmer is always averse,
For he has to leave work that puts coin in his purse
And he cannot buy bread with the gold on the furze;
Both furze and inspectors to him are a curse.

Whins, whins, whins, whins,
Beautiful blossoms on needles and pins:
'Tis the man on the mattock that pays for his sins:
If the men who make laws had their knuckles and shins
All bloody with spikes, they'd know something of whins.

("Gorse",
Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

This particular verse was no doubt inspired by Archie's own exasperation with the authorities. Millicent Baxter wrote in her *Memoirs* of how "we were continually harassed by Government officials because of Archie's stand in the war. We didn't have much gorse, but we constantly had notices to remove the little we had" (65).

Some of Archie's other poems are concerned with Romantic notions of pastoralism and Creation. One such verse is "Spirits of Harmony, Music, and Love" which seeks to celebrate the beauty of nature and the wonder of Creation. This is a poem Archie must have been particularly pleased with as there are several copies of it among his collected papers. It is one which James not only liked enough to transcribe into the third of his notebooks; but as Millar relates, he also wrote to Noel Ginn stating it was "a fine and beautiful poem which my father wrote before the last war knocked all poetry out of him" (303):

> In the elemental chaos
> When the worlds were in the making
> None could rule nor disobey us—
> We were there in all partaking;
> And we caught the rhythmic motion
> Of the orbs that roll and swing
> In the vast ethereal ocean
> Deep beyond all fathoming.
>
> ("Spirits of Harmony, Music, and Love",
> Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Archie was a religious man.

His sense of awe at the perfection of God's Creation is a theme he returns to on several other occasions. "Spirits of Harmony, Music, and Love" is a poem that celebrates innocence, and carries with it the sense of childlike naiveté often associated with Adam and Eve before the Fall:

> But it was our delight, when the earth in pride
> Of her sweet virgin beauty, in us did confide—
> Then we rustled and played
> Through her forests, and swayed
> All the reeds and the brackens and bade them rejoice;
> And the birds in their flight
> When the sunshine was bright
> Caught the sound of our music and each found a voice.
>
> ("Spirits of Harmony, Music, and Love")

It is a poem reminiscent of the beginning of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" where the poet sees nature as the epitome of innocence and joy:

> Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
> And let the young Lambs bound
> As to the tabor's sound!
> We in thought will join your throng,
> Ye that pipe and ye that play,
> Ye that through your hearts today
> Feel the gladness of May!
>
> (*William Wordsworth: The Poems* 528)

It also bears a close resemblance to Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"

where the poet ponders on what he perceives to be the innate beauty and goodness that exists within the natural world:

> The lovely shadow of some awful Power
> Walks though unseen amongst us, visiting
> This peopled world with as inconstant wing
> As summer winds that creep from flower to flower,
> Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower.
>
> (*The Poems of Shelley* 525)

Matthews and Everest, in their gloss of Shelley's poem, state:

> The organization of the 'Hymn' was clearly influenced by that of Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality,' but...Wordsworth seeks adult consolation for the loss of the child's instinctive harmony with God's creation; while [Shelley] reaffirms his early vision that the humanist virtues of 'Love, Hope, and Self-esteem' will eventually redeem a godless and disharmonious world.
>
> (*ibid*)

Verse such as this by Shelley and Wordsworth ably reflects Archie's own beliefs. As already stated in the previous chapter, he envisaged God as perfect; thus the world He created was perfect until its corruption by evils such as greed and power. Despite this corruption Archie was always of the belief that pacifism and 'doing unto others' would ultimately reunite all peoples of the world.

The fact that Archie was primarily a Romantic poet is unquestionable as many of his other pieces continue in much the same vein as "Spirits

of Harmony, Music, and Love", perceiving Creation and God as a source of awe and wonder. Another such poem is "His voice it is the low vast tone", a verse which James has also copied into the twelfth of his notebooks. It consists of four quatrains, and is, as the title suggests, essentially an exploration of the notion of Creation itself and Archie's perception of it. The poem has a set rhyme scheme and is in iambic tetrameter. It features a number of lines where alliteration is used to good effect. The first two lines:

> His voice it is the low vast tone
> His eyes are deeper than the deeps
>
> ("His voice it is the low vast tone",
> James K. Baxter Notebooks. MS 704-A/12)

use both alliteration and long vowel sounds to create an impression of the majestic immenseness often associated with God and god-like qualities. The fifth line: "It trails through all Creation's length" with its use of "l" sounds further adds to the image of vastness and magnitude. The ninth line uses repetition of "h" sounds: "And in his hands he holds the cup." The repeated use of the glottal sounds creates an impression of breathlessness, of someone almost overcome by emotion.

These poems, although extremely conventional, do serve to illustrate how well Archie understood the intricacies of language and how he could manipulate it in order to create various effects. The poem "Great Universe, How Vast", a copy of which can be found in James's third notebook, is a further indication of this awareness. It, too, is constructed in iambic trimeter, except for the first line "Great universe, how vast" which

begins with a spondee; the poem itself is structured into five quatrains:

> Great universe, how vast
>
> The fashion of thy spheres;
>
> What know we of thy past
>
> Or future countless years?
>
> ("Great Universe, How Vast"
>
> Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

The eleventh and twelfth lines: "In murmur music-deep/ All whisper one great Name" shows the use of onomatopoeia to create the impression of someone quite awe-struck and able to speak only in a reverential undertone. The final quatrain which begins: "O drowsy soul awake!/ Breathe deep of Heaven's breath" uses long vowels and soft consonants to give a sense of someone waking up, after a long, dreamy sleep.

Another poem "Hail Rock and Pillar Thou" is a short poem inspired by the Rock and Pillar Range of Otago. The poem's deliberately hieratic language is an echo of poets such as Wordsworth, who viewed nature as an extremely significant subject. Thus, with words such as "blast", "fearless", and "mighty", the Rock and Pillar Range is attributed with the type of majesty normally associated with God or God-like qualities. This poem also features a very set rhyme scheme consisting of three quatrains, each in iambic trimeter, and once again shows Archie's ability to manipulate language within restricted confines. The only occasion the poem differs in its meter is with the very first line which begins with a spondaic foot: "Hail Rock and Pillar thou" which yet again gives the poem a sermon-like quality. The final stanza:

Thy heart like mine was rent
And torn, and still 'tis full
But here we're different
Thy head is mighty cool.

("Hail Rock and Pillar Thou",
Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

puns on the meaning of "mighty" as God-like in character, while also giving an impression of strength.

Archie further demonstrates how conversant he was with a variety of poetic conventions with the poem "Death", or "The Watcher". This poem has been transcribed into the third of James's notebooks under the title "Death", and has also been preserved in Archie's private papers, where it appears as "The Watcher". This is a poem of three quatrains, all predominantly in iambic pentameter, and uses the convention of personification as Archie attributes human qualities to the persona of Death:

Men call me Sorrow, yet I am not sad;
I have no pain yet know not to be glad
I'm sought though feared by all beneath the sun;
All seek my house although I visit none.

I see Mankind oft stand without my walls –
With hanging heads from kingly courts they come;
They enter in to tread my gloomy halls:
They share my all, to thank me all are dumb.

Who drains my cup unto its dregs may know

The highest raptures unto mortals given –

My finger strikes the deepest woe

But points the soul to all the joys of heaven.

("Death", James K. Baxter Notebooks,
MS 704-A/3; also titled "The Watcher",
Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

Although death was a common poetic theme, this poem bears a marked resemblance to Shelley's "They die—the dead return not" where Misery is also personified and given human qualities.

They die—the dead return not—Misery

sits near an open grave and calls them over,

A youth with hoary hair and haggard eye—

.....

Misery, my sweetest friend—oh, weep no more—

Thou wilt not be consoled—I wonder not!

For I have seen thee from thy dwelling's door

(*The Poems of Shelley* 557)

Although the style between the two poems is very similar, Archie's poem lacks the depth of emotion expressed in Shelley's. Misery is given a far more real, and tragically human face, while Sorrow's experience is narrated in a more matter-of-fact and reserved manner, as if the speaker, Sorrow, is making his observation from a distance, whereas Misery is closer to the action, sitting beside the "open grave".

This emotive distance is where Archie differs notably from the

Romantic poets he admired. His poetry is never an in-depth exploration of his own feelings and emotions; thus his work is, as Frank McKay rightly states, more of an example of the "nature" romanticism—which, according to M. H. Abrams, would be an incorrect term to apply to the romantic poets in general (*A Glossary of Literary Terms* [Fort Worth, Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993], 128). It is, however, a suitable term for Archie, as although he saw nature, landscape, and Creation, as significant subjects, he did not discuss them in terms of their importance to *himself*; they are discussed in relation to a wider, more general type of macrocosmic significance. This is probably because he was essentially a very private person and was reluctant to reveal his innermost feelings; something which is also a feature of his autobiography, *We Will Not Cease*, which, despite the traumatic nature of the subject, is related in a quite detached, unemotive manner. As has been mentioned previously, he wrote his book, not with the intention of drawing attention to himself and what he suffered, as "all my instincts are against putting such things before the public"; but in order to highlight, and thus bring an end to, government policies regarding nonconformists (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/194/10, ms). Poems of a personal or private nature would therefore be completely out of character for him, although it is my opinion that his verse suffers as a consequence.

As can be seen, despite Archie's lack of formal education, he was obviously well-read and possessed a good grasp of poetry, its conventions, linguistic rhythms, and of language itself. His poetry is essentially Romantic, and much of it is, as Frank McKay rightly states, derivative, as illustrated by the poems obviously inspired by Burns, Shelley, and Wordsworth. Some of Archie's other verse, particularly "The Vision" and

"Simon's Town" with their ballad structure, show considerable poetic skill and a sense of ease not apparent in his sometimes rather uncomfortably earnest Romantic verse. It would thus appear that light-hearted verse, featuring the sing-song rhythm of the ballad, did actually come far more naturally and readily to Archie, rather than did verse of a more serious nature. This fact would, in itself, indicate Archie was a natural balladeer or storyteller—rather than a natural poet—and would reinforce Frank McKay's statement that Archie had the ability to "enliven many a gathering of family and friends" (7) with his poetic renditions. Despite the fact that it must also be acknowledged that some of Archie's verse is not of high technical merit—hence its continued unpublished state—this does not mean that his work is not of significance or of interest, or that it should continue to remain unrecognised. To continue to ignore Archie's verse is to fail to grasp many of the origins and inspirations of James's work which appeared from the outset of his literary career. Thus an increased understanding of Archie's poetry is important if a greater appreciation of James's verse is to be obtained.

Chapter 3

James K. Baxter: Following in the footsteps

The life and literature of James K. Baxter has been the subject of considerable discussion since his death in 1972. His relationship with Archie has occasionally been the focus of some of this critical opinion, although such attention has tended to be restricted solely to the emotional aspects of their relationship, and has devoted very little analysis to the existence of distinct literary connections that are apparent between the poetry and prose of the two men.

In the previous chapter, which discussed the poetry of Archie, specific themes such as pacifism and Creation, often expressed in the Romantic style, were shown to be characteristic of his verse. The poetry of James will now be focused on, and in doing so, it will be seen that many elements apparent in Archie's verse are also reiterated in that of his son. Although such qualities are certainly not unique to either James or Archie, and are indeed common to many poets—especially those writing in the Romantic vein—the similarities between the language and beliefs expressed firstly by Archie, and then by James are extremely marked and these parallels are in fact evident from the outset of James's literary career. Most of the material used in this discussion is contained in the manuscript notebooks now held in the Hocken Library, and is of restricted access. Permission to view any of this poetry and prose, up until the period 1944, has been granted me by Mrs. Jacquie Baxter.

Despite the fact that some critical opinion has, in the past, sug-

gested that Archie was a profound influence on James's life and literature, there has been no concerted attempt to view the verse of father and son in conjunction with one another in order to determine exactly how this could be so. The term "influence", particularly in a literary context, is rather problematical, and cannot be used without some attention to the radical theory of influence Harold Bloom first proposed during the 1970s, where he considered a poet had to "swerve" away from a precursor in order to create their own imaginative space. This type of struggle Bloom interpreted in a variety of ways, some of which can be seen to have some relevance to this discussion.

As already stated in the previous chapter, critical opinion has, to date, been fairly uniform with regards to Archie, and except for his autobiography, has largely ignored any other literature he wrote. Therefore, it is somewhat paradoxical that many biographers should see Archie as having so profound an effect on James, when in reality they are only viewing half a picture. As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the whole, or the extent of the effect Archie had on his son, can only be seen when James's very early literature, (also largely ignored by critics, except for one or two verses all biographers commonly seem to quote), is viewed. Thus it will become apparent that many of the origins and inspirations of James's early unpublished verse owe a considerable debt to the passion he inherited from the Baxter clan, and illustrate the fact that, although it has sometimes been thought otherwise, he was actually just as capable as they of remaining committed to an ideal; this is evidenced by the intense and emotive nature of the verse concerning his brother, Terence, in particular.

Firstly, however, it is necessary to turn to the criticism which has generally surrounded the Baxter father/son relationship. Frank McKay

makes the rather standard critical observation in his biography that "the person who affected [James] most was his revered father" (47). He further states how James, in learning of Archie's wartime experience, came to regard his father as both "victim and hero" (34). W.H. Oliver claims not only was Archie "a model [who] could not be disregarded" (10), but that James saw his father as "the fount of compassion, rectitude and wisdom" (25), and also that this was perhaps the only relationship he had in his life that was "untroubled" (145). Charles Doyle also notes that James considered social criticism to be an important factor of his work (88), and that the desire to use his art for this type of purpose stemmed from the fact that he was "influenced deeply by his father" (93). There are certainly a number of well-known poems James wrote about Archie that give credence to all of these opinions. One of the most oft-quoted poems regarding Archie is "To my Father" (1947):

> There is a feud between us. I have loved
> You more than my own good, because you stand
> For country pride and gentleness, engraved
> In forehead lines, veins swollen on the hand;
> Also, behind slow speech and quiet eye
> The rock of passionate integrity.
>
> .....
>
> Almost you are at times a second self;
> Almost at times I feel your heart beating
> In my own breast as if there were no gulf
> To sever us. And you have seemed then rather
> An out-of-time twin brother than a father...
>
> (*Collected Poems* 65)

This poem, which became Millicent Baxter's favourite, stands as McKay rightly states, "like a monument to the memory of the man they both loved" (*The Life of James K. Baxter* 99), as it reveals the almost saint-like status James bestowed upon his father, and also voices a sense of the oneness he obviously felt they shared. "To my Father in Spring", written later in 1966, shows as McKay claims, the continued love and regard for his ageing father which has now become tinged with compassion (223):

> not always firm on your legs
> at eighty-four. Well, father,
> in a world of bombs and drugs
>
> you charm me still – no other
> man is quite like you! That smile
> like a low sun on water
>
> tells of a cross to come...
>
> (*Collected Poems* 365)

The allusion to the cross in the last line is multi-layered, as it suggests not only his father as approaching either a trial, or burden of some sort, but also connotes martyrdom and sainthood, as well as alluding to the crucifixion-style punishment Archie was subjected to during his conscientious stance in

World War I.[14] In "Pig Island Letters" (1963), the excerpt invariably quoted, refers to this ordeal also:

> When I was only semen in a gland
>
> Or less than that, my father hung
>
> From a torture post at Mud Farm
>
> Because he would not kill...
>
> (*Collected Poems* 281)

As can be seen, critical opinion has noted the fact that Archie featured largely in his son's consciousness. McKay claims in his biography that "in the poems [James] was writing on the war, he was one with his father in seeing its futility" (55), and that as their relationship was so close, "it was to be expected that [James] would become a romantic poet" also (47). Doyle devotes some attention to the verse in James's very early notebooks, stating that most of this early verse is "pastiche...in character, much of it is nature verse and there is evidence of the pacifism for which his father and brother paid dearly in each of the World Wars" (37). While these comments are true, any impact Archie's literature may have made on his son's verse is still ignored, as criticism such as this offered by McKay and Doyle, still tends to

[14] Archie described the manner in which a sergeant carried out this punishment on him in *We Will Not Cease*: "He took me over to the poles, which were willow stumps, six to eight inches in diameter...and placed me against one of them. It was inclined forward out of the perpendicular...he tied me to it by the ankles, knees and wrists. He was an expert at the job and he knew how to pull and strain at the ropes till they cut into the flesh and completely stopped the circulation. When I was taken off my hands were always black with congested blood. My hands were taken round behind the pole, tied together and pulled well up to it, straining and cramping the muscles and forcing them into an unnatural position...Earlier in the war, men undergoing this form of punishment were tied with their arms outstretched. Hence the name crucifixion. Later, they were more often tied to a single upright, probably to avoid the likeness to a cross. But the name stuck" (105-6). Archie was repeatedly subjected to this punishment at a compound known as 'Mud Farm' in France for many days, usually for several hours at a time, even in blizzard conditions. Usually Archie relates his story in quite a detached manner; the pain this treatment caused him mentally and physically must have been truly terrible, as one of the few emotional occasions in his book is when he describes the effect this punishment had on him.

focus solely on Archie himself rather than on any of his poetry or prose. However, it is apparent that once Archie's literature is taken into account, the extent to which his notions and beliefs, especially pacifism, appear in these early notebooks highlights the fact that James's verse cannot be broadly categorised as "pastiche", as his poetry has very specific imitative origins which can be directly attributed to his father's writings, as so much of James's verse clearly reiterates many of Archie's particular values.

Having stated the minimalist nature of the criticism that has traditionally surrounded this early verse, it must also be said that the exception to all of this criticism is Paul Millar's 1996 PhD. Thesis, " 'Spark to a Waiting Fuse': The Correspondence between James K. Baxter and Noel Ginn 1942-46." This particular thesis makes a significant contribution to the understanding of James's poetic development during his teenage years as it features much of his early verse, and discusses various aspects of it in depth—including the substantial part Archie played in his son's life at this time—and reveals well how Terence's confinement was a source of deep personal anguish to James. However as I have already stated in the previous chapter, while I agree with Millar up to a point, I would argue that the formative years of James's boyhood were a crucial phase of his literary progress, rather than the later period of adolescence which Millar remains concerned with.

James himself has brushed off his early juvenilia, stating in *The Man on the Horse,* that it was "undoubtedly imitative" (125). And certainly it would appear that this is so—imitative, in particular, of his father. As James has further dismissed this early verse, claiming that he "had absorbed the Romantic poets from my father—and their subject matter had little to do with my own life. They were curiously insubstantial" (*ibid*), so too, has critical opinion. However, while the style is "imitative" as he says, it is my con-

tention that past critical opinion has been too quick to accept this rather blasé explanation, considering "imitative" and "insubstantial" to thus go hand in hand with unimportance. Such criticism has therefore failed to consider whether or not this early verse is in fact as insubstantial as James has claimed, and as a result, has not sought to ask the question: imitative of what, or more importantly—of whom?

It is most unlikely that James really did consider his early verse to be so insignificant. He once wrote to Lawrence Baigent saying he was able to "look back quite objectively on all the poems I have written; some of them are surprisingly good" (12 October 1945, MS 699, Macmillan Brown Library, Christchurch). Also, as Millar shows, James had stated in an earlier letter to Noel Ginn on 11 August 1943, that "most of my earliest poems are very short but very good poetry" (253). Another reason why this early verse must, in reality, have been important to James is that which Millar further notes in his thesis, where he claims the early notebooks were obviously a source of great pride to James as "the care he took in their presentation, and the considerable labour he must have expended, suggests to me that the first fourteen MS Books were not merely records of poems, they represented proof to him that he was indeed a poet" (62). It is thus a major oversight not to take this verse into account as it allows a greater understanding of what was important to James during the formative stages of his life. Terence Baxter is of the opinion that the key to an understanding of his brother was to read his verse: "You could almost, sort of, read his mind by his poetry" (personal interview, 13 June 2001). Vincent O'Sullivan also suggests much the same when he writes there is "no period of Baxter's life, and no important event, which cannot be found in his poetry or prose" (*James K Baxter* [Wellington, Oxford University Press, 1976], 4). Bearing these comments in

mind, the fact that Millar also states, "Baxter returns to adolescence in his writing time and again for the remainder of his life" and that this period provides a "full understanding and appreciation of his later life and poetry" (7), makes this early period particularly important. The key to the greater understanding Millar refers to, does in my opinion have very specific roots, and these are to be found at the outset of James's literary career with his boyhood verse. Although Millar does state that "Baxter's achievements in his later verse cannot be fully appreciated unless his childhood phase is taken into account" (74), the basis of his thesis is concerned primarily with the later Baxter/Ginn correspondence.

While James's very early work does not contain specific references to Archie, as does his later work, it nevertheless illustrates how particular themes centred on Archie's beliefs and verse had already taken root in James's schoolboy consciousness. The most obvious of these themes is of course, pacifism. As I have already demonstrated in an earlier study, this was a cause James identified with while still at school (33).[15] A poem written in 1938 when he was at Sibford School, England, clearly demonstrates this fact:

> Down the aisles of the ages,
> Roll the organ notes of God,
> Urging on through history's pages,
> Heroes to the paths untrod.

[15] This particular study was an extended essay, 'Writing Back to Baxter', written as part of a BA (Hons) year, discussing pacifism in the literature of Archibald Baxter, Robin Hyde, John A. Lee and James K. Baxter, which argued that all four writers not only sought to condemn war, but also saw the advent of it as something that could never solve existing social or economic problems—it merely served as a catalyst in the creation of new ones. Thus, Archie Baxter's pacifist beliefs, expressed much earlier, became a paradigm for the literature of the other three writers (Jennifer Johnston, University of Canterbury, 2000).

Why should man his brother's life,
Heedless of religion take;
Should the cannonades of strife,
Many homeless orphans make?

All the armaments of man,
In carnage and destruction seen,
Since the human race began,
Accursed to the world have been.

Haul down the bloodstained banner;
Hoist better in its place,
And let the pilgrims enter,
Who battle now for peace.

("The Curse of War", Barrie Naylor Collection,
Misc MS 1354, 1938)

This particular poem is quoted in full since the expression of such overt pacifism illustrates well the obvious textual parallels with Archie's poetry and prose. However, it must also be remembered that "The Curse of War" was written during the Spanish Civil War, and virtually on the eve of the Second World War when, according to McKay, war, politics, and pacifism, were much-debated subjects at Sibford School (37). It was also during this time that Archie began his own autobiography, *We Will Not Cease*. Both of these facts would have then made James more aware than perhaps he would have ordinarily been of pacifism and pacifist issues. Nevertheless, the titles the young poet has toyed with, and crossed out, on the poem's original

manuscript are of interest: "Anti-War", "War is Not Progress", and "Fight For Peace", all illustrate a strong moralistic stance, and give an added insight into the poet's frame of mind, and the message he was trying to convey at this time. Such titles also echo Archie's belief that war could not, and would not, ever solve economic problems or achieve social unity ("Conscription", Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/197: 4, ms).[16] Much of this type of sentiment is expressed in Archie's poem, "Loud Calls the Voice of Reason":

> Deep-rooted stands the treason,
> The tyranny and wrong
> Of Man against Mankind-
> The millions still are blind
> .....
> The world's true conqueror comes
> Without the beat of drums-
> "Peace and Goodwill to mortals!"
> The message was of old,
> Is now, and still shall be
> Till all Mankind are free.
>
> (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)[17]

One of the poems James wrote when he was eight years old is "The Brook", which is amongst a batch of very early poems transcribed in the seventh of his notebooks. This poem is of interest as it reveals that almost from the start of his literary career,[18] the causes of pacifism and socialism had already be-

[16] For a fuller discussion of this particular belief refer to p 24 above.
[17] For a fuller discussion of this poem refer to pp 38-9 above.
[18] James stated the first poem he composed was at the age of seven, "O Ocean, in thy rocky bed", (*The Man on the Horse* 124).

gun to play on the mind of the young poet. "The Brook" also reiterates Archie's belief that all men were part of a "universal brotherhood" who ultimately desired peace and unity. Such notions were therefore well known to James, who had no doubt heard of them through the many pacifist discussions that took place at his home. Millicent recalled that their house was often a meeting place for "pacifists, embryo pacifists, and conscientious objectors" (106). "The Brook" illustrates well James's early grasp of pacifist and socialist concepts:

> The river and the brook are one
> As all mankind should be;
> The river runneth to the sea
> And mankind to eternity.
>
> We leave the shore with fierce might,
> For ever in the unceasing fight
> Of elements of war...
>
> ("The Brook",
> James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/7: 55-6)

Another poem in similar vein, emphasising the fact that he considered all nations as part of an international brotherhood, James wrote approximately four years later when he was twelve:

> Why cannot war forever cease
> And nations dwell in lasting peace,
> For Liberty's not gained by strife
> And taking of a brother's life?

.....

Let us fight on through every ill
With brother-love and steadfast will
And peaceful banners wide unfurled
Throughout the nations of the world.

("Peace",
James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/1: 21, c. 1938)

Yet another poem appears in the same notebook, further demonstrating how important socialism and pacifism had already become to him:

War and calamity, evil and anarchy – death of Prosperity – when shall they cease?
Hark to the Pacifist! Hark to his doctrine now: 'Yours is Prosperity, warring forgot' ...

("Hail to the Pacifist",
James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/1: 95)

Although Millar states James "quickly tired of" this sort of overly didactic verse (75), the time-span during which he wrote in this particular vein is by no means brief. If "The Brook" is taken as the start of this phase, many of the manuscript poems, which are of a similar nature, were written when he was sixteen, (James in fact wrote "The Helmeted"[19] when aged seventeen), which indicates a period of nine years—a lengthy attention span for any child. In fact during the Vietnam War James returned to this type of verse on several occasions.

[19] James K Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/10:169, Hocken Library, Dunedin. See pp 183-4 below.

The poem, "Summary", written when James was fifteen, shows a more sophisticated level of thinking than that of "The Brook", but is still an echo of one of Archie's beliefs that, during wartime, the State ignored the rights of the individual; thus the First World War had only occurred because "rival imperialisms" had fallen out ("Conscription", Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/197: 4, ms). Archie's further opinion that war was nothing short of legalised murder, and that the people themselves should always have the right to decide whether they wished to partake in it, (*ibid* 2), is clearly expressed in "Summary":

> Men murder for a form of government,
> New politics are ever in the mint –
> Emblazoned banners guide us to the pit
> And politicians of far-heard repute
> Hail with loud shouts the war-cry of the mode;
> I ask the dreary question long since made:
> 'Am I the sole sane in a world gone mad?'
>
> ("Summary",
> James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/4: 153-4)

In taking into account this early verse, it is easy to appreciate how entrenched Archie's beliefs had already become within his son's consciousness. There is also no doubt that certain aspects of Archie's autobiography continued to weigh heavily on the young poet's mind, particularly during Terence's confinement. A poem sent to Lawrence Baigent in 1945, (which was six years after the publication of *We Will Not Cease*), emphasises how this was so. A passage in Archie's autobiography relates how his brother,

Sandy, had told him of the cruelty shown towards prisoners in France:

> He told me, too, of an Australian soldier who came into the prison while he was there, a splendid physical specimen...he vanished into the punishment cells. After some time had gone by they used to hear his screams. At the end of a fortnight, he came out, his magnificent physique gone, his nerve gone, a cringing abject creature, eager to jump at the slightest word from the guards, who used to amuse themselves demonstrating the lengths to which he would go in the completeness of his subjection.
>
> (*We Will Not Cease* 98)

The following poem James sent to Baigent is, without doubt, an almost plagiarised version of the excerpt from Archie's book:

> At cell and bull-ring
> In winter warring France the warders had their fun
> making the magnificent australians [sic]
> jump like automatons and eat their own excreta.
>
> *Be sure,* they said to those tormented men
> *You have not loved the dark trees of explosion*
> *nor that red grass*
> *whose roots are human veins...*
>
> (MS 699, 25 June 1945,
> Macmillan Brown Library, Christchurch)

The inhumanity of war was therefore certainly something the young poet was very aware of, as another poem, "On Visiting a Gallery of War-Pictures", reveals. The tone of the poem is extremely cynical as the speaker has, at times, the sensationalising tone of a tour guide conducting a party of tourists around a gallery, pointing out pieces of interest here and there with a

macabre air of fascination, not to mention satisfaction that such terrible images of human suffering have been captured so well on film :

> Enter and pause. Here are white walls
> Refurnished by a thousand errant wills
> Who formulated line on mental line
> The image of men living, slain,
> .....
> Come hither – look long and steadily at this!
> The naked soul of war exhibited thus.
> 'Air-gunner in gun-turret at night'—...
>
> (James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/5: 33-42)

On other occasions the speaker is critical of those who remain unaware of the real nature of the horror of war, which to them is a distant and idealised concept, or of the fact that the weapons they so carefully labour over might inflict terrible injuries upon fellow human beings:

> The artisans care not if the flame that flows
> Blasts hell from booming throats or splinters down
> To slash live agonising flesh and bone
> .....
> ...khaki soldiers waiting their depart
> Shout and sing in chorus joyfully:
> To them the horrors of bleak war is lie
> And they are heros [sic] in a high romance...
>
> ("On Visiting a Gallery of War-Pictures")

This is a long poem which, according to Millar, was sent with a letter to

Noel Ginn in September 1942 (141). James apparently wrote it after he had visited an exhibition known as "British and New Zealand War Pictures" which toured New Zealand towns in 1942, and was sponsored by the Great Britain Ministry of Information. Millar also makes the observation that the poet's descriptions were indeed very accurate (*ibid*). Ginn wrote to James saying this verse was "a great, great epic of the sorrow of our uncomprehending minds" (*ibid* 225). This particular poem also draws attention to James's precocious sense of cynicism, and highlights his increased ability to appreciate the complexities of social pacifism, a cause close to Archie's heart:

> And men die not to live but live to die –
> Shall they retain their youthful ardour long?
> When stark steel pierces body, brain, or lung?
> .....
> But fifty-cannon cruisers are slight pawns
> To cabinets with diplomatic pains;
> And Man, the unit, has no place in schemes
> Where empires shamble through belligerent shams.
> The patient sweating mortals are the same
> On either side...
>
> ("On Visiting a Gallery of War-Pictures")

These sentiments also echo Archie's belief that "peoples of all nations are naturally peaceful until they are stirred up by the war propaganda of the governing classes" (*We Will Not Cease* 108). There is no doubt James had come to embrace this thought also, as another pacifist poem he sent to Noel Ginn articulates:

"These are garrulous fools inciting

Us to fear

Who have learned bleak lesson

From terror-lesion

When earthquake shook the cities afar

In cataclysmic war." ...

("Such Shall Not Be", Noel Ginn Collection, 89-148)

Archie also wrote, movingly, in his book of the sheer waste war inflicted on human life:

> The bonds that unite men had snapped and each man was alone, dreadfully alone. Their lips moved continually, but they could not speak. They could whisper and mutter. They could shout and howl. They had once been men. They had been soldiers who went out to fight. Now they were only human wastage...looking at them I wished that all the world could see these men, could look into their minds and souls, scorched and blasted by the fireblight of war (166).

This impression of war as a waste of young and vital lives was also expressed in another of James's poems, "Boys Laugh at Ease", which he wrote when aged sixteen:

Old men less wise

Control the enterprise:

Old men can see uncaring

Lost limbs or blinded eyes.

.....

Young men sleep well,

Wake to the crash of shell;

Old men dream of the tempest

Ringing a winter knell.

When all are dead
Then be no prayer said
    Save: Youth among the cannons
Sought life, encountered lead.

(James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/8: 67-8)

This opinion that very little value was placed on the life of the common soldier within the macrocosmic scope of war was in fact a fundamental pacifist sentiment, and one which Archie had expressed previously when he wrote that the soldier was merely regarded as "cannon fodder", especially by military authorities who had substantial resources at their disposal through the implementation of conscription, which then allowed them to "gamble with mens [sic] lives" ("Conscription", The Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/197: 1-2, ms).

All of these poems of James' are in fact only a sample of a very large body of work; the sheer size and volume of his manuscript notebooks are proof that during his teens he was certainly a prolific writer. Many of the other verses in these notebooks are of a similar nature as those already discussed. Titles for some of these pieces, to name but a few, include: "The Song of Faith", "The Parting of the Ways", "Awakenings", "Patriotism (a satire)", and "Salute the Flag." As has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, Millar claims that in the first six manuscript notebooks alone, approximately a quarter of the verse was overtly pacifist in content, while many more poems alluded to pacifism (75).

The promotion of pacifism is, however, not the only similarity that

can be drawn between the verse of Archie and James. Much of the remainder of James's early verse also illustrates the extent to which he copied Archie's Romanticism in his own poetry. A comparison between some of Archie's Romantic verse and that of James will demonstrate how this early style (which James claimed was "imitative") was in effect a reflection of his father's beliefs, values, and poetic style; thus any similarity to Romanticism is secondary. One of Archie's Shelleyean poems, "Spirits of Harmony, Music, and Love", will illustrate how this suggestion works:

> In the elemental chaos
> When the worlds were in the making
> None could rule nor disobey us—
> We were there in all partaking;
> And we caught the rhythmic motion
> Of the orbs that roll and swing
> In the vast ethereal ocean
> Deep beyond all fathoming.
>
> (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)[20]

Part of one of James's early poems, "Spirit of God", written when he was nine, is, as the title suggests, a celebration of the celestial, and makes an interesting comparison to the verse of Archie, as much of the language used is very similar:

> ...Thy blue ethereal kingdom stretches far,
> For up to many an undiscovered star,
> Where flaming meteors hiss and swing

[20] For a fuller discussion of this poem refer to pp 43-5 above.

More free than any earthly king.

Not all are bound by one accord
In one stupendous heavenly mind
So universal and so kind.

(James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/7: 57-8)

The last stanza of "Spirits of Harmony, Music, and Love" is as follows:

But it was our delight, when the earth in pride
Of her sweet virgin beauty, in us did confide-
Then we rustled and played
Through her forests, and swayed
All the reeds and the brackens and bade them rejoice;
And the birds in their flight
When the sunshine was bright
Caught the sound of our music and each found a voice.

The style is undoubtedly Romantic and is comparable to the very first of James's poems to appear in the manuscript notebooks entitled "The Water-fall", which he wrote when he was eleven:

The mossy stones are moist and soft
A lark is singing high aloft;
The rippling waters curve and dash
And in the sunlight brightly flash
In glorious, foaming, babbling rush,
And 'gainst the grasses gently brush

Then over in confusion gush
To tumble far below:
A swirling wall of silver light,
Here floating high in mist-clouds bright
And there in silent flow.

("The Waterfall", James K. Baxter Notebooks,
MS 704/A-1: 1, October 1937)

Both poems are the sort of "nature" verse referred to in the previous chapter, where Archie typically observed the action from a narrative and emotional distance and was never actively involved himself. While "The Waterfall" is Romantic, and would have been a style taught in schools at the time, it must also be remembered that it was composed during a period in which James was writing verse to please his father and to seek his approval. According to Terence their father's encouragement and support was important to the literary efforts of his brother. Thus James's desire at this time would have been to emulate, and please his father, and would have been happy to let himself be guided by Archie, rather than merely choosing to follow a literary convention:

> The main thing is, he knew...he had somebody in the background approving...somebody who [he] respected a lot, ...that gave [him] a thing to strive for...My father had a...fair influence, 'specially in his [James's] earlier days.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

As stated earlier, the notion of influence is undoubtedly controversial. Despite the fact that Millar suggests that Archie "*must* be seen as the

strongest influence acting on his son at this time" (74), absolute influence is in itself difficult to prove. This problem is further compounded by the theory first introduced during the 1970s by American critic, Harold Bloom, which radically alters the manner in which literary influence can be perceived.

Bloom's theory has been the subject of much debate over the years as influence has traditionally been understood, as Graham Allen claims, to be the recognition of particular "similarities in style, imagery, and overt poetic articulations of affiliation" (*Harold Bloom* [New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994], 17). This is not, however, Bloom's definition. For him poetic influence does not simply

> mean the transmission of ideas and images from earlier to later poets. This is indeed just 'something that happens,' and whether such transmission causes anxiety in the later poets is merely a matter of temperament and circumstances.
>
> (*The Anxiety of Influence*
> [New York, Oxford University Press, 1997], 71)

According to Bloom, every poem emerges from relationships with other poems, rather than originating from an atmosphere of creative isolation. Thus there are no separate poems as such, and every poem is related in some way to every other poem. Bloom states: "influence, as I conceive it, means that there are *no* texts, but only relationships *between* texts" (*A map of misreading* [Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1975], 3). A previous, or "precursor" poem is then "misread", either consciously or otherwise, by the later poet in order to create a new text. Thus, all subsequent poems are a "misreading" of a previous poem or poet (*The Anxiety of Influence* 70). The anxiety for the

later poet is then a question of whether they can overcome the strength of the precursor. Bloom claims only the "strong" poets are able to do this, as they can recognise the power of the precursor and proceed to misread the precursor in such a way as to create imaginative space for themselves. The "weak" poet cannot; they may recognise the precursor's strength, but are unable to meet what amounts to the anxiety of influence, and are thus condemned to languish forever in literary limbo writing "very forgettable poems" (*A map of misreading* 199).

Some of Bloom's theory relies on Freud's analysis of Oedipal impulses, as Bloom considers the weaker poet's feelings towards the stronger precursor are often ambivalent as in a normal father/son relationship. According to M. H. Abrams, the son/poet feels "hate, envy and fear of the father-poet's preemption of the son's imaginative space" (240), thus the latter poet will then deliberately "misread" the former in a defensive manner in order to overcome their strength (*ibid*). In a normal familial relationship this would be seen as a form of rebelling or a flouting of authority.

As this type of theory is specifically aimed at literary (although not necessarily, literal) father/son relationships it is politic to consider whether or not it is relevant to this discussion. One of Bloom's strands of thought is that the anxiety of influence is essentially about the fear of death, and is also closely related to sexual jealousy, as well as fear of the natural body (*A map of misreading* 198). There can be no doubt that James was preoccupied with death during his teenage years. While death is a well-used literary convention, he tended to focus on it to a quite unusual extent. This is perhaps due largely to Archie's book, *We Will Not Cease*. The discovery of seeing in print what had previously only been talked of, horrified the young James and he was deeply affected by it as war, death, and suffering began to as-

sume very real proportions for the boy; a result of which McKay claims in his biography "initiated that preoccupation with death which was to become so much a part of his consciousness" (34). When asked about the nature of his dark poetry, James replied that people frequently wrote about love and death. However, as Oliver rightly states, despite this reasoning "he wrote about death a good deal...more than his throwaway explanation would account for" (49). The manuscript notebooks feature many poems regarding death, and often the language used is despairing in the extreme, portraying a vision of a decayed, shrunken world quite without hope or redemption. One such poem is "The Bell" written when he was approximately fifteen years old:

> Yet thought I, "Here are shadows of dead flesh
> Not the clear human feature quick to flush,
> And shall our faith know only withered seeds
> With Death's dark menace on all sides?—
> For fault is in soul-sparsity and dearth
> When worship is the diadem of Death." [21]
>
> (James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/5: 6)

Terence Baxter is quite emphatic that, at about the time of his detention, he felt James had undergone some sort of deep personality change, although Terence was unable to elaborate fully as to what he thought had caused such a difference in his brother:

> Up 'til he was about in his middle teens, he was a perfectly ordinary happy

[21] See p 174 below regarding the punctuation at this point of the poem.

> young man, I reckon. Going quite well...and then, for some reason or another, he seemed to turn over another way altogether, and start to get sort of...not exactly, not morbid, but just sort of serious, serious with aspects of life, and so forth. And of course it went into his poetry, too.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

Terence's opinion also reiterates the earlier statement of O'Sullivan's that anything important to James always made its way into his work (4).

McKay and Oliver also note that sexuality and sexual guilt were always a problem for the young poet. James later wrote that his time at Sibford School, England, was "a period of undesired sexual enlightenment for me" (*The Man on the Horse* 133). An excerpt from his poem "School Days" sheds further light on the subject:

> On to the watershed of tears
> With those small angular companions,
> Handlers of the penis and the pen.
>
> Hard to forgive them even now,
> Precursors of the adult nightmare— ...
>
> (*Collected Poems* 194)

McKay also relates in his biography that James later wrote to a friend telling how, when aged sixteen, he had contemplated suicide: "Why? Because I was a wicked wretch who would go insane because of masturbation" (59). This sexual guilt, fear of the body and preoccupation with death is undoubtedly a feature of the loosely autobiographical novel, *Horse* (Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1985). When Horse woke up he lay, "curled up like

a foetus...He closed his eyes, and his hand moved down to his crutch...Then resolutely he drew his hand back. A boy might do that; a man of eighteen, Fern's lover, couldn't" (4-5). The confusion of sexual guilt, fear of the body, and obsession with death is also apparent when Horse has sex with Fern: "When the thunderhead descended on them both, and lightning struck at his loins and head, Horse heard the graves open. His ancestors emerged, tears falling on their mossy beards, their rotted members whole again. *Blessed be the light that dies*, they cried in Gaelic" (63). This sort of writing illustrates how Oliver is correct to consider that James's early sexual experiences gave him "a view of sex which linked it inextricably with death" (43).

It is also obvious that Oedipal impulses, such as that which Bloom identifies as part of his theory, do figure in some of James's work. This fact has already been noted by critics such as McKay and Doyle, although they consider these impulses as pertaining more to his mother. McKay claims in *The Life of James K. Baxter* that James was "obsessed" with the relationship with his mother (281), while Doyle is of the opinion that "we can trace an Oedipal element through his work" (124), and illustrates this point with several of James's poetic references to women. Obviously James himself was not unaware of the likelihood of such Freudian interpretations of his work, as the overt nature of the short poem, "To Dr. Sigmund Freud", written at about fifteen or sixteen years of age, illustrates:

> All my complexity of art may be
> A subterranean functioning of the
> Frustrated and incestuous libido.
> It may be so, it may be so—

But if it is I do not wish to know.

(James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/7: 15)

As Millar shows, in a set of notes James wrote about the poem "The Unicorn" he stated rather facetiously, "one could of course interpret the whole poem in Freudian terms...It fits nicely" (577). On another occasion he acknowledges the Freudian nature of the effects which he felt stemmed from both of his parents: "somewhere back in the Freudian fog belt these two strong influences began to work on me" (*The Man on the Horse* 122).

Despite the fact that on the surface these Oedipal impulses do seem to have more than a passing resemblance to Bloom's theory, it is unlikely that James felt he needed to struggle with Archie in the poetic arena. Certainly, he may have found it difficult to emerge from Archie's shadow on a personal level, owing to the fact that Archie was held in high regard and esteem by many people; but, given the nature of James's feeling for his father, it is hard to accept he resented Archie, or felt overshadowed in a poetic sense by him. According to Terence, James liked their father to read his work, and enjoyed hearing Archie's opinion on it, even as an adult (personal interview, 13 June 2001). Therefore, one cannot imagine that he felt the necessary poetic angst to wrestle with his father in the Bloomian sense, particularly because Archie, who was without doubt a heroically strong person, does not really appear to be a "strong" enough poet for James to wrestle with. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. In what may, or may not, be a coincidence, James and Archie both wrote poems entitled "Burns" and "Death". Archie's "Burns" poem is quite traditional, and while his admiration for Robbie Burns is obvious, it is essentially an idealistic portrayal:

His living lyre to nature ever true
Awakes such echoes in the hearts of men
As bid their souls aspire to dare and do
And nobly play their part in life: and when
To love he tuned its strings how well he knew
The master touch; and to the pure refrain...

(A Baxter, "Burns",
James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-1/10)[22]

James also admired Burns, and continued to do so throughout his life. His portrayal of Burns, written at the age of fifteen, has quite a different tone. Its earthy nature manages to capture images of Burns' peasant origins, as well as evoking an essence of the appeal he must have had for his contemporaries:

...Thus have I seen him stand,
A restless ghost upon an Ayreshire [sic] hill—
Thus shall I see him still:
Grasping the heavens but found close to earth
Too strong in passion for a bloodless land;
He, diademed with stars, of peasant birth.

Aye, his hot soul flares out
In the most simple of things
As once in most uproarious drinking-bout
His 'Pegasus' might not have wings,

[22] For a fuller discussion of this poem refer to pp 30-2 above.

Yet 'twas a fiery nag without a doubt.

(J Baxter "Burns",

James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/5: 90-2)

What is actually apparent is that, in theory, James has used a Bloomian *clinamen*[23] to overcome the precursor, Archie, by sensing Archie was right to praise and immortalise his hero, but did not go far enough in his efforts to do so. Thus, James has completed a poem he felt was incomplete by, in Bloomian terms, "misreading", or "swerving" away from it, and sending it off in a different, more earth-bound, direction.

The second example involves two poems about the inevitability of death. Archie's poem is written from the point of view *of* Death, or Sorrow: "Men call me Sorrow, yet I am not sad", ("Death", James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/3),[24] and attributes human qualities to Death. Death realises his presence is unwelcome, and that his task is a thankless one, but what he can offer to people, if only they were able to realise it, is in fact the benefits of the Holy Grail:

I see Man-kind oft stand without my walls—

With hanging heads from kingly courts they come;

They enter in to tread my gloomy halls:

They share my all, to thank me all are dumb.

[23] According to Bloom a *clinamen* is defined as: "Poetic misreading or misprision proper...A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a *clinamen* in relation to it. This appears as a corrective movement in his own poem, which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves" (*The Anxiety of Influence* 14).

[24] For a fuller discussion and further bibliographic details of this poem see pp 48-50 above.

Who drains my cup unto its dregs may know
The highest raptures unto mortals given—
My finger strikes the role of deepest woe,
But points the soul to all the joys of heaven.

(A Baxter, "Death",
James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/3)

In contrast to this is James's poem, which has in fact quite an unusual tone for him at this particular time, because he does not see death with despair; he sees it as something conquerable. Admittedly the first two lines begin with characteristic gloom: "The cynics wail for death/ And Death will come—". The second stanza, however, portrays someone who will not be amongst the aforementioned cynics:

But I can feel in me
    A life predestinate
That knows its immortality
    And bows not to the hand of Fate!

Aye, Death shall tryst with me:
    When I have run my race
I shall greet him courteously
    And face to face.

(J Baxter "Death",
James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/4: 117-118)

As can be seen the subject is the same as Archie's, but once again, in Bloomian terms, James has "misread" his poetic father. His poem is, in effect,

saying that while he acknowledges Death will come, he is not afraid—he is up to challenging and meeting his opponent—and not only will he meet him; he will also have the inner strength to match him. This could be construed as James locked in a Bloomian *agon* with his father, who having assumed the persona of Death in his precursor poem, is rejected and unwanted by mankind. However, James's poem draws attention to the fact that he will not be like the rest of the human race—he will turn and take the cup, and feel the offered benefits of the Holy Grail, thereby confronting, and meeting, the challenge of his poet-father quite effectively, and in fact, even "courteously", and in doing so he will then, according to Bloom, emerge as the "strong" poet who is in control of the situation.

Despite the fact that I have been able to manipulate these verses into some semblance of conformity to Bloomian theory, given the obvious differences in the technical merit of the material itself, it remains somewhat difficult to imagine James as threatened in a poetic sense by his father. A more likely scenario is that suggested by Peter Simpson in Patrick Evans's *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature* (Auckland, Penguin Books, 1990), where Simpson considers the challenge James had to face in order to establish his own creative space and thus avoid "the anxiety of influence", to have come from a far stronger poet, in the form of Allen Curnow, who was seen as "the inescapable voice of the father admonishing his sons" (165). There is no doubt that sometimes James did feel threatened in a poetic sense. As Millar shows in a letter James wrote to Noel Ginn in 1943, he did indeed feel a sense of anxiety as he claimed: "I am not so original now as I once was, and may be losing my grip. I have a feeling that I developed steadily...and since then have swerved...to a less vigorous yet unavoidable line" (250). This statement was made at a period when he was experimenting with

many other forms of poetry, and reading widely of other poets, which indicates that the anxiety was not associated with his earlier work, which, as he clearly states, he considered to be more "original" and "vigorous". Thus, it would appear that Simpson's suggestion does have merit, and the later stand-off between James and Curnow, and their respective camps, during the early Fifties and Sixties is far more in keeping with a Bloomian type of *agon*, than a struggle with Archie would be.

Nevertheless, James did see poetry as some sort of struggle, as in a brief note he wrote in one of his notebooks on poetic thought, when aged-about seventeen, he seems to have performed an *apophrades*[25] of Bloom himself. Bloom insists that all poets can be traced back to, but can never overcome, the colossus of Milton. Thus it is interesting to note the comparisons James draws as he seems to pre-empt Bloom's own thought:

> Great poetry must die—die to all save the poet, the critic, and the man born out of his time.
>
> Its knell was rung when the phrase succeeded the word, when sentimentality succeeded in verse, wit and philosophy. The sentimentality has gone, but with it has gone the last shreds of a popular appreciation of strong and complex thought.
>
> We accept the merits of our greatest poets by hearsay; most readers, if it were written by a modern poet, would turn revolted from

[25] Bloom defines *apophrades* as: "the return of the dead...the later poet, in his final phase, already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds his own poem so open again to the precursor's work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that ...the poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work" (*The Anxiety of Influence* 15-16).

> Milton's "blind mouths", but recognise Milton and dare not criticise...Thus concentration of meaning evaporates.
>
> (James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/10: 148)

As can be seen, although various strands of Bloomian theory can be roughly applied to the poetic relationship that exists between James and Archie, the theory itself does not fit together well enough to make such an argument convincing. There is no doubt that a literary relationship does exist between their texts, as indeed Bloom states there must—and the evidence of such a relationship is the main focus of this whole discussion. However, Bloom's theory falters with regards to Archie and James as his definition of an inevitable struggle between the weaker poet/son and the stronger poet/father, is clearly not apparent in their case. If the relationship under discussion was that between James and Curnow, who was a much stronger poet, as Simpson suggests, that would be another matter altogether. However, as this thesis is concerned primarily with the exploration of thematic links and textual parallels, which is what Bloom terms as the more traditional notion of influence, that is the "transmission of ideas and images" and the extent to which these similarities occur, his theory does not really remain a suitable frame of reference as regards to this particular father/son relationship.

There is no doubt that Archie did indeed transmit many "ideas and images" to his son, and that James saw Archie as his poet/father in the traditional sense. McKay has already noted that, although James received his linguistic ability from his better-educated mother, his creativity, vision, and passion, stemmed from the Baxter clan (45). Certainly James felt he owed his literary ability to his father; a point he makes explicit in an ex-

cerpt from the poem, "The Poetic State":

'How is it,' I was asked 'to be a poet?'
And since the question had been simply put
There were no suave evasions on my part.

The title does not rouse me to emotion.
I see no virtue in bland deprecation,
The 'I, sir? No, you flatter me' tradition.

Poetry is, I said, my father's trade,
Familiar since my childhood...

(Noel Ginn Collection, 89-148) §

The use of the word "trade" makes it obvious that James considered his father to be involved and knowledgeable in the art of poetry; it was evidently an area in which he considered his father worked, and was conversant with. In "To my Father" he also states:

You were a poet whom the time betrayed
To action. So, as Jewish Solomon
Prayed for wisdom, you had prayed
That you might have a poet for a son...

(*Collected Poems* 65)

There is no question that James also felt himself to be indebted to Archie's guidance and example, and that without it he would not have had the courage or the opportunity to develop his potential, either as a poet or as a per-

§ Although the manuscript copy of "The Poetic State" is typewritten and unsigned, thus absolute authenticity cannot be determined, in my opinion this poem was composed by James K. Baxter. Noel Ginn also considers this poem to be one of Baxter's as in a letter to me he states he clearly remembers receiving another poem, "To Lucia at Birth", which is typed on the same page as "The Poetic State". Ginn considers both poems to be set out and typed in the same manner as many other pieces Baxter sent him during the period of their correspondence. Ginn further states: "there is no doubt in my mind that the poem was written by Jim" (letter to author, 24 March 2002, letter currently in author's possession).

son:

O mild preceptor of my early youth,
True father still in action, word and deed.
In whom I find the archetype of truth –
For this, my love and gratitude thy meed!

But most to thee I owe this tribute now,
That had I known thee not I would not be
A fount where Heliconian waters flow,
Partaker of the joys of Poesy!

Beauty of language and of form I found.
And with thy helping guidance ever nigh,
Where else I ne'er had left the ground,
I first could flutter, then might fly!

("To my Father",
James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704/A-4: 37)

The number of poems in which Archie appears throughout James's literary career leaves no doubt that his father was the central figure in his son's life. As Millar writes, although James had apparently told Noel Ginn "'he loved mountainous figures'...his father was, and remained, the most mountainous of all the individuals who influenced him" (75-6). "To my Father" illustrates not only the esteem in which he held his father, but also the extent to which the young poet felt himself to be moulded by the tradition and ancestry of the Baxter clan, and that with Archie's guidance, he too could move along this same path, first by "fluttering", then by "flying."

Such sentiments are expressed yet again in the poem, "To A McC.

L. Baxter", which is quoted in full as it reinforces once more not only how James felt himself to have been shaped by his ancestry, but also how fundamental it was to him, as he considered himself to be yet another link in a chain of ancestral continuity. As McKay states "his lifelong preoccupation with origins is largely explained by the influence of a family for whom Scottish history was part of themselves, and the ancestors living presences" (1). Nowhere are any of these beliefs better portrayed than in this particular poem:

The child's estate dies not
        But is made strange:
Canyon or violet,
        River and mountain-range;
New landscape cooled and set
        In lava-change.
The foreign element
        Of the dead highland hill
Once hymned and sacrosanct
        Grows bone and will.

The shadowed ancestor
        Speaks in my blood;
Talents deaf-mute before
        Struggle to man-hood.

Words crumble in war-din
        At death's barbarian shout;
It is the man within
        Fashions the man without.

The rare and native vein

Will not run out.

("To A. McC. L. Baxter", Noel Ginn Collection, 89-148)[26]

The timing of the composition of "The Poetic State", "To my Father", and "To A. McC. L. Baxter", is significant as they were all written during Terence's confinement as a conscientious objector. These poems are not only a clear indication of the manner in which James perceived his father, and indeed the wider Baxter clan in general, but also illustrate how affected he was by Archie's and Terence's stance as objectors. Wartime conditions, and Terence's ordeal, which would have brought home to James Archie's tremendous strength of character and principles, no doubt heightened this preoccupation with his father. These poems were all written when James was about sixteen years old; a time at which his mother later wrote in her *Memoirs* he was "steeped in Archie" (69). The prevailing social climate would also, as Oliver suggests, have increased James's sense of affinity with his Baxter ancestors, whom he considered had been threatened by "alien wealth and power" in the past (20). It seemed that this new wartime threat was a pattern that had previously been relived by Archie, and was being re-enacted once more by Terence. McKay claims in his biography that James was fearful his brother would be forced to suffer the same war-time treatment as their father (65), and further states that much of the poetry from this period, particularly from James's first book, *Beyond the Palisade* (1944), shows images of a "beleaguered" Baxter clan (*ibid* 82), as both Terence and James, and indeed the wider Baxter family as a whole,

[26] This poem has also been transcribed in the tenth of the James K. Baxter notebooks, MS 704/A-10.

would have found themselves at odds with much of society. The poem, "Glencoe", also written during this period, makes explicit James's vision of his ancestors under threat and siege, as it tells of a Highland clan callously murdered by former friends, now turned traitors:

Then at the dawn
The aged chieftain, called from sleeping
Shot in the head and body.
Friends nearby
Coming into the grey winter morning
At sound of shots, killed also. The chieftain's wife,
Who set by lately to them their provender,
Rings torn by teeth from her fingers.
Men shot by their fires-
Save one, who flung his plaid in the soldiers' faces
And fled to the snow-clad screes. Boys, women, and old men
Dead by their burning houses, snow for a blanket.
Boys clung to their murderers' knees – knees that perchance
And served them as seats by the fireside –
Pistolled for their pains...

(James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/9)

According to Terence, Archie felt a very keen sense disappointment and estrangement from some of his previous pacifist allies. One such person was Peter Fraser who had opposed conscription in the First World War, but in the Second, as Prime Minister, performed an about-face as his party voted to reintroduce it:

> He [Archie] got sore about certain things, a little bit hurt about certain things. For instance, he was very friendly with Peter Fraser...[he] came to see my father, and I remember I was sitting on Peter Fraser's knee once... one of the family I suppose...Maybe because Peter Fraser was Scots...he [Archie] was Labour of course. But when the war came, you see, the second one came, he [Fraser] was Prime Minister. And then, of course subscription[sic] came in. And I think my father thought, well, Peter Fraser, ... would be able to see what the situation was with myself, and my father...and he sort of felt that, that, Peter Fraser perhaps could have brought in some sort of thing, to try and make things a little bit different as far as anybody that was against war. And he certainly was against war himself... and he was locked up, too...I think that my father felt that Peter Fraser had...let him down.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

Archie had therefore hoped—and not without foundation—that his former friend and ally was in a position to do more for his son, the boy Fraser had once sat so paternally on his knee. Instead, as Millar shows, the teenage Terence received the harshest sentence meted out to any objector in Otago at the time (29). This must have been an extremely bitter disappointment to the Baxter family who believed that their former friend had the power to help them in some way. According to Millicent, Archie did become ill at this time with an extremely painful carbuncle that developed in the back of his neck. He felt it had been caused by "the feelings of rage" that had welled up inside him (108). Thus, it is not difficult to appreciate where the origins of verse such as "Glencoe" sprung from.

Strangely enough, despite the fact that it was Terence who was imprisoned, he felt his younger brother to have had a harder time of things

during the war period than he himself had experienced in detention camp:

> When I was, more or less, sort of locked up, he was still going to...High School. And of course, he...went to a High School where there was cadet training. And...I think there was some sort of appeal, or something...he didn't do it [cadet training]. But of course, through not doing it, actually I reckon in his case, he, he had a harder time than me. Because he was in amongst where, where these people were having their cadet training, and so forth, and, and he wasn't. And he was, sort of, counted out. Not only that, they knew...that his brother was locked up...so he had to put up with people saying 'Well, look at the way your brother's behaved, what do you think about that?' That sort of talk. And, so I reckon he had a harder time, really myself, than I did. All that happened to me was that I was...locked up in jail...to start off, as many of them were, and...then put into the camp and locked up there.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

Undoubtedly this must have been a very difficult period for the teenage James. Millicent refers to the fact in her *Memoirs* that the family's pacifist stance had caused her younger son "to go through unpleasantness and often persecution" (106).

Terence Baxter was only nineteen when he was sent to detention camp for four years for refusing military service. As already stated, Terence's was a particularly harsh sentence, probably, as Millar suggests in his thesis, because Archie was so well known to the authorities (29). Millar also writes that Terence always felt from the outset of his confinement that he was treated unfairly because of Archie's previous stance. For instance, Terence could have been placed in a camp at Conical Hill, which would have been

nearer to his home; instead, "despite being the most mild-mannered of men Terence was sent to Hautu camp for problem inmates" (87-8). Once there he often felt victimised, and Millar suggests that perhaps Millicent, an outspoken woman, may have unwittingly contributed to this, as she had often clashed with Len Greenberg, the Controller-General of the camp (88).

It is easy, therefore, to appreciate how James could have considered Terence as being forced to reiterate Archie's earlier ordeal, and how he felt his family was under threat once more. He wrote many poems at this time, some of which, particularly those concerning his brother, are as Millar suggests very emotive, and James would not allow them to be published, for he knew Terence, who was a very reserved and private person, would hate to be discussed in literary circles (42). In a letter to Ginn, James once wrote: "don't tell Terry, as he mightn't like it, but he comes into some of my not-to-be-published epigrams...he might not like to be carried in the back of the Art-Cart, he being sensitive on any infringement of his personality" (*ibid*). One such poem is the anguished "To My Brother":

> The poem should grow a flower out of your chest
> But I must silt it like a crystal in solution;
> Calling your double who bleeds inside my head,
> To hear me curse the bitter and the bloody
> Who hold you jailed and dumb in a chicken-pen:
> Samson in Gaza; but your true-born impatience
> Of rhetoric wins. Your fear of being petted
> I have also; but compromise unsteady.
>
> I dreamt once you were drowned and woke crying.
> And now you are drowned; not in the violent sea

Of high explosive, but shut to rot in a tub:
Now you are a man with a hard face, I am hearing.
For you the shut horizon. You are part of my blood.
Thus the intolerable ache of consanguinety [sic].

(James K. Baxter Notebooks, MS 704-A/13)

The depth of emotion in this particular verse, and in the three others concerning Terence, which were all written during the Baxter/Ginn period of correspondence, illustrates how correct Millar is not only with his assertion that these poems have "an intensity only equalled in later poems in which he refers to his father and his wife" (46), but also that Terence's confinement was a source of great pain to his younger brother (42). The poignant, almost child-like wistfulness, of the closing of one letter to Ginn is moving it its simplicity and shows just how deeply James felt this enforced separation from his older brother: "Love to Terry, wish I could see him just now" (*ibid* 427). In the posthumously released collection, *Cold Spring,* of which all the verse was written during this period, Millar notes that James originally wrote an epigram that was to accompany it, which he later crossed out:

To all pioneers of truth
whose hearts have been broken
or hardened by oppression.

(qtd. in Millar 452)

No doubt James included his brother, and his father, both of whom he referred to as his "double" and "out-of-time twin", and thus by extension himself, as a part of these pioneers.

As can be seen by the entire Baxter family's indomitable pacifist stance, they were a passionate clan; when they came to embrace an idea, they embraced it fully, and without reservation. This was a trait obviously handed down to Terence and James, and is one reason why I am unable to agree with McKay's acceptance of the suggestion in his biography that, although James was a boy of passionate enthusiasms, more often than not, these passions were brief (51). James's continued commitment to pacifism throughout his life shows his passion for this belief was anything but a passing fancy. The advent of the Vietnam War not only gave him the chance to experience more immediately that which he had only heard previously from his father and brother, it also gave him the opportunity to use his art as social commentary, and he quickly became involved in anti-war campaigns and meetings (*ibid* 211-13). Poems such as "A Bucket of Blood for a Dollar" and "The Gunner's Lament" are two of his condemnations of the Vietnam War. He also wrote two papers for the Catholic Peace Fellowship in which he detailed particular principles he considered essential for world peace. In one of these papers he questioned whether any war could be called "just", and stated that any war fostered a "self-perpetuating mechanism" ("Further Notes on Peace Work", James K. Baxter Papers, MS 975/138: 1). Statements such as these strongly resemble Archie's earlier claim that "no war can be called just" (*We Will Not Cease* fwd. n. pag.), and that "a decisive victory on either side will mean sowing the seeds of future wars"(*ibid* 123). As already demonstrated in the previous chapter, just as Archie used poetry to provide Burnsian-type social comment, so too, did his son. This reflection of Archie's morals and beliefs relates to an earlier point in this chapter where James stated to Baigent that he no longer accepted his parents' standards. As has been shown, it is quite

ironic that he not only accepted their standards, but actually came to embrace many of them with great commitment himself. He was perhaps closer to reality than he knew at the time when he wrote in a poem much earlier to Archie and Millicent, that "we understand each other's speech" ("Letter to My Parents", MS 704-A/13: 200, James K. Baxter Notebooks). James's ability to remain committed to an idea or belief is shown in many ways; his conversion to Catholicism; his desire to identify with Maoridom; his great love for his father; and his earnest attempts to try to help others overcome drug and alcohol problems.

Thus it is apparent that James's childhood verse has quite specific origins, many of which are concerned with his father. Archie's beliefs and verse are inextricably linked to the verse of his son, and James drew on these themes, particularly pacifism, throughout his literary career. The early manuscript notebooks in the Hocken Library all point to an overwhelming prevalence of an "Archie factor" which is present from the outset. However, despite the major impact and effect Archie had on his son, he himself did not present enough of a literary threat to James to cause him to doubt himself, or his art, in the Bloomian poetic sense. It is also obvious that the World War II period was a time of major upheaval in James's teenage life, and the effect of his brother's confinement on him is something that cannot be underestimated, as James was undoubtedly a person capable of deep and constant feelings. Only once this early verse is viewed is it possible to see the origins of the inspirations for much of James's later work; and only when it is viewed in conjunction with Archie's verse and beliefs, is it possible to see that, during this childhood and adolescent phase Archie was undoubtedly the most powerful and potent inspiration of all for his son.

Chapter 4

The Legendary Baxters

Amongst the Archie Baxter archival material now held in the Hocken Library is an unpublished, untitled, and undated, manuscript copy of a novel he wrote (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/195/1-2). In his biography, *The Life of James K. Baxter*, Frank McKay states this is "a fictionalized account of Archie's Gaelic-speaking ancestors after their arrival from Scotland, and of their adventures at Gabriel's gully, the Dunstan, and the early Brighton region" (10). However, a close analysis of this novel will reveal that it is of rather more significance than this brief description would suggest. Archie's text illustrates how a wealth of ancestral mythology and legend had already surrounded the Baxter and McColl clans for generations, and that their stories were in fact already well known to their descendants prior to James's writing of them. Therefore previous critical opinion, which has considered James to be instrumental in mythologising these ancestors, can be seen to be inaccurate, as the presence of Archie's manuscript highlights how a substantial foundation of fact and fiction was ready, and waiting, for James to build upon. Thus, the leap of his imagination towards these forebears was one he could make with relative ease.

Millicent Baxter does not give specific dates as to the novel's composition. She merely mentions certain events that she claims occurred at much the same time as Archie's writing of it. Thus according to her Archie's novel was written somewhere around the early 1960s. In her *Memoirs* she states the *Otago Daily Times* had sponsored a competition seeking to cele-

brate "the early days in New Zealand" (125), and that as Archie had always wanted to write of the settlement of the Brighton area the competition gave him the opportunity to do so (*ibid*). She also claims that although the editor of the *Otago Daily Times*, John Moffett, had apparently read and liked Archie's novel, the final decision, as regards the winning entry, was supposed to have been made by a group of people whose interest finally petered out. According to Millicent the ultimate decision was then left with the editor of the *Southland Times* who chose another novel as the winner, which Millicent thought was very similar to Archie's "both in theme and structure" (125-6). She considered Archie had written "a better novel, but then I am prejudiced"(*ibid* 126).

On 6 October 1975 Millicent handed this manuscript to the Hocken Library to be placed in its archives. A note written by the then librarian, M. G. Hitchings, now accompanies the manuscript. It states:

> Jim's mother, Mrs Millicent Baxter, today gave me a typescript[27] version of the above numbered folder which is a 'novel' on the history of Brighton by Archibald Baxter. Mrs Baxter said it was rather a chronicle, told in fictional form with all names altered, for fear of hurting the feelings of some Brighton people at the time it was written. Mrs Baxter assured me that everything said about Brighton happenings in the chronicle actually did happen, and it is therefore an important historical record.
>
> (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/195/1)

[27] There is a hand-written addendum on the note itself at this point which indicates this typescript version is held in the MS1136 collection. I was unable, however, to view the typescript version. I have viewed only the original manuscript and any page numbers referred to in this thesis are therefore taken from the original.

The manuscript itself is comprised of two sections. The first section contains pages one to seventy-six and is written on loose, unbound, numbered sheets of paper. This is the section referred to as MS 975/195/1. The second section contains pages seventy-seven to one hundred and seventy-seven, which are contained in a bound book. This section is referred to as MS 975/195/2. Two loose, unnumbered pages, which are obviously a draft of the novel's ending, are also included in the MS 975/196 collection.

Reading the manuscript is, at times, somewhat difficult as Archie has, more often than not, written two lines within a space that would normally only be used for one. There is also some confusion at the beginning of the manuscript. The novel begins in a logical sequence with pages one through to twelve. However, after page twelve the numbering is out of order and goes back to page three, and from there moves straight on to page seven, where it continues to be numbered sequentially from then onwards for the rest of the novel. In order to avoid confusion, for the purposes of this thesis, any duplicated page numbers referred to will have the page number followed by (a) if they are in the first set of pages one to twelve, or (b) if they are in the second re-numbered sequence.

It seems likely that Archie had decided to write a short draft of an introductory chapter on page 3(b) as it appears to be out of sequence with the pages either side of it; or perhaps he had decided to recast some earlier pages in the text. Either of these suggestions is possible, as some of the detail on page 3(b) has been included in earlier pages. For example, on page 3(a) the main characters, the McDougalls, are given physical descriptions that are repeated, slightly reworked, on page 3(b). There is also a description of the McDougalls' temporary home at Saddle Hill on page 10(a) that is repeated in 3(b). A lengthy account of the McDougall's decision to emigrate to New

Zealand is given from pages 4(a) to 8(a); however, the main gist of this part of the narrative is mentioned only in passing on page 3(b).

Evidently Archie was interested in seeing this manuscript in print. According to Paul Millar, James helped his father edit the manuscript and tried to help him find a publisher for it (e-mail to author, 6 February 2001). Charles Brasch must also have read, and offered some critical opinion of the manuscript, as Archie wrote a letter to him in which he stated:

> Perhaps I didn't tell you that I intended to make the theme of the book more clear. I think it could be done as you say by an introduction. I had thought of writing another chapter and perhaps both would be an advantage. I was really very pleased by what you say of the work as it stands at present.
>
> The central theme of the book, if it has a real theme, is living off the land, and the narrative being in a very real sense true should have some value on that account. I would be only too pleased to have Mr McCormick's opinion.[28]
>
> Thanking you for what your are doing in the matter about *We Will Not Cease.*
>
> (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/190)

Charles Brasch must have decided to see Archie at some stage prior to this letter being written, as in her *Memoirs* Millicent wrote that she and Archie came to Christchurch in 1948, at which time Theo Schoon painted Archie's portrait. She also goes on to state—although it is unclear as to whether she

[28] I believe Archie is probably referring to E.H. McCormick here, a conclusion Paul Millar agrees with, as at the time McCormick was working as a research fellow and had quite a wide range of literary interests (e-mail to author, 30 August 2001).

and Archie were still in Christchurch during this period—that they both contracted glandular fever. Apparently while Archie was ill

> Charles Brasch asked if he could bring Frank Sargeson out to see him. I said better not, as he was ill. They came all the same, but I couldn't let them see Archie who was in bed with a high temperature. They were very disappointed and, I think, considerably annoyed with me. I fear I offended Charles Brasch past forgiveness.
>
> (113)

It is logical to assume that Brasch's thwarted attempt to see Archie did have some particular literary purpose in mind, especially as Sargeson accompanied him.

Archie's letter to Brasch is of interest for two reasons. Firstly, Archie may have indeed tried to write either an introduction or another chapter as he says; hence the error with the page numbers. Secondly, the letter clearly shows that the manuscript was composed at a time significantly different from that which Millicent asserts in her *Memoirs*, which, although a text regarded as central to any Baxter studies, reinforces Frank McKay's claim in the preface of his biography that Millicent's view of events "which is in danger of becoming the official version, needs considerable modification" (vii). The dates and events she gives to indicate its composition are somewhere between 1959 and 1962 (124-5). Archie's letter to Brasch, however, indicates that he had written it at least eight to ten years prior to this; the letter is dated 20 February 1951. There can be no doubt that Archie is referring specifically to this manuscript since the main theme is, as he says, "living off the land", and the story itself, as will be shown, does have a factual base. Also, the last sentence of the letter clearly indicates that the text

Archie is referring to in the main part of his letter is different from that of his only published work, *We Will Not Cease*.

One reason for the differing dates may be that Archie had perhaps written the bulk of this work at an earlier period, and had returned to it at a later date, nearer to that which Millicent gives. It does seem more likely, however, that she has in fact simply confused the dates, as according to Dunedin historian, and former employee of the *Otago Daily Times*, George Griffiths, the newspaper ran two separate novel competitions. The first was in 1948 to mark the Otago centenary, and was won by Georgina McDonald's novel, *Grand Hills for Sheep*; the second was run in 1961 to commemorate the *Otago Daily Times'* own centenary, which was won by Errol Braithwaite's *An Affair of Men* (letter to author, 27 September 2001). Griffiths clearly remembers that "Monty [sic] Holcroft, then of the *Southland Times*, judged at least one on them" (*ibid*). The dating of the particular competition judged by Monte Holcroft is confirmed by Holcroft himself in the first of his autobiographies, as he states his editorship of the *Southland Times* ended in May 1948 (*The Way of a Writer* [Whatamongo Bay, Cape Catley Ltd, 1984], 196). He also claims:

> One of the bigger jobs came to me from the *Otago Daily Times*. The province was celebrating its centenary, and the newspaper wanted to mark the occasion by organising a competition for an historical novel. John Moffett, the editor, offered me a fee of £100 to act as the sole judge. This was hard work, depressing as I felt around me a rising tide of weak or bad writing; but I ploughed through more than a hundred full-length novels...the winning entry was *Grand Hills for Sheep*, by Georgina McDonald...Joan Stevens judged it fairly in her *New Zealand Novel* when she praised the author's pioneer women but dismissed the men as 'cardboard figures', and found the gold-fields 'over-dramatised'. The book, Miss Stevens decided, had 'sincer-

> ity, feminine sympathy, and an ear for the Scots tongue'.
>
> (*ibid*)

This passage thus allows an accurate dating of Archie's manuscript which was obviously submitted to the first competition in 1948 when Holcroft was still editor of the *Southland Times*. Millicent clearly states John Moffett's involvement, and also mentions that the editor of the *Southland Times* was the judge of the particular competition to which Archie submitted his novel. In addition to this she states the winning entry was of similar nature to her husband's; Stevens' references to pioneering women, gold-fields, and Scottish speech, are indeed also features of Archie's text.

The more precise dating of the Archie's manuscript is of significance as it illustrates the fact that Archie's novel was written well before James's own loosely autobiographical novel *Horse*. The later dates alluded to by Millicent would have indicated that both Archie and James's novels were written virtually concurrently. However, as can be seen this is clearly not the case, and does in fact mean that James (who has often been described as extremely "mythopoeic", and who no doubt would have been aware of his father's manuscript) would have had access to a substantial, yet relatively unknown, source of mythology for most of his adult literary career.

Archie's novel is itself rich in Scottish traditions, and gives the reader a keen insight into the hardships and challenges that would have often faced early pioneers and gold prospectors. Whether or not it is an example of the "weak and bad writing" suggested by Holcroft is a matter of opinion. Terence Baxter considers his father's novel to be written in a somewhat older style, which perhaps needs some slight revision in order to lend it more appeal to the modern reader. He does in fact compare it stylistically to Marcus

Clarke's *For the Term of his Natural Life* (personal interview, 13 June 2001). There are numerous anecdotes throughout the text to add interest, many of which probably would have had more appeal to readers of days gone by. For example there is a suspected murder (but the body is never found), cattle rustling, an elopement, whiskey poisoning, brawls, detailed descriptions of various gold-prospecting techniques, and even a coffin amputation—apparently a fairly common practice at the time. According to George Griffiths, Archie would not have needed to have had any specific dismembering incident in mind as "coffin amputation anecdotes have done the rounds as long as I can remember" (letter to author, 27 September 2001).

The novel's primary importance is, however, that it allows an appreciation of the sense of ancestry that would have surrounded, and accompanied the development of James both as a child and a poet, as the manuscript illustrates how immersed the Baxter clan were in their past, and how, for them, these ancestors had already become the stuff of legend. Their stories had been passed on from generation to generation; thus the Baxter forebears were, in fact, already mythologised. Biographers, such as Frank McKay, have always been quick to point out James's ability to mythologise his past. McKay states that these ancestors "readily assumed for this most mythopoeic of our poets the dimensions of myth. And he had the strength of imagination to acclimatize the myth in his own region of Otago" (1). The presence of this manuscript, however, reveals firstly that no "acclimatizing" was needed because the mythologising process had already taken place; and secondly that it was not a tactic unique to James. Certainly, he drew on a wide variety of sources for his work, such as Greek, Roman, and Maori mythology, but he was able to build his work upon a solid foundation of local and Scottish myth and legend that had already been laid by the ancestors

themselves. As has often been the case in the past, especially as regards to an indigenous or marginalised people (and history has shown that the Scots were often so under English rule), their long oral histories were sometimes unrecognised by the dominant culture, and thus a perception remained that a cultural history itself did not begin until later realised in the written form, which was considered a more authoritative and superior method of communication. In my view this is an error that previous critical opinion has made concerning the histories surrounding the Baxter clan. James himself admitted: "I have been fortunate enough to find the ready-made myth of long-bearded Gaelic-speaking giants distilling whisky among the flax from time immemorial" (*ibid*). It is therefore curious that McKay should state emphatically in his footnotes that "the distilling of whisky can easily be dismissed as an example of his [James's] fantasy", and then proceed to suggest somewhat paradoxically in the next sentence that "there is usually some basis in fact for what Baxter says" (299). McKay also goes on to note that there were some well-known stills in the area, some of which are described in Eric Olssen's, *A History of Otago* (Dunedin, John McIndoe Ltd, 1984). Olssen states in his account that "drunkenness was common (indeed many settlers brewed their own pernicious brews and at Saddle Hill and Hokonui the custom survived for generations)" (45). It is unclear if one of these stills is that which Archie refers to in his manuscript, although the main characters, the McDougalls, and the whiskey maker known as 'The Poacher', do live at Saddle Hill. Nevertheless, the presence of such a still in the manuscript certainly casts doubt on whether McKay is correct in dismissing the previous statement of James's so easily; after all, we will see that Archie juxtaposes fact and fiction throughout his text.

Archie's novel has many links with stories of the Baxter and McColl

pioneers of Otago, and is, as Millicent claimed, historically accurate in many ways. The known facts concerning the clan's early ancestry, and of their emigration to New Zealand, do in fact appear in Archie's manuscript, and there are indeed many interesting comparisons which can be drawn between these facts and Archie's novel. Although McKay devotes considerable attention in the first chapter of his biography to the Baxter family history, according to his endnotes, most of his information is gleaned either from an article in *The Otago Witness* regarding the *Lady Egidia*, or from Olssen's *A History of Otago* (299). McKay also refers to the diary of a chaplain on board the *Alpine*, Alexander Campbell Begg (3), and further states that as it was Millicent who was interested in Archie's family history "what we know about his ancestors is mainly through her" (24). There is no suggestion at any stage in McKay's text that he has used information in Archie's manuscript novel as a basis for his own material.

The factual nature of Archie's account is evident from the outset as the novel is centred around the story of two brothers and their families who have emigrated to New Zealand. The main character is Alan McDougall who travels from Ballachulish, Scotland, with his wife Margaret and their six children on board the *Alpine*, arriving in Dunedin during the autumn of 1859 (MS 975/195/1: 1-3[a]). Ballachulish is the area in the Western Highlands where Archie's maternal grandparents, the McColls, did in fact live. As Frank McKay has already noted, on 12 September 1859 Archie's grandfather, Archibald McColl, accompanied by his wife Margaret Learmond, and their seven children, did indeed arrive in Dunedin on the *Alpine*. The aforementioned chaplain, Begg, recorded in his diary that many of the Highlanders could not speak English, and thus services were conducted in Gaelic. Archibald McColl was apparently never able to speak English perfectly (3).

Archie was obviously aware of this and has preserved this difficulty in his novel, as several of his characters are unable to speak English, and at times require the services of an interpreter. Some other characters speak English only haltingly, often making glaring grammatical errors.

One of the ways in which Archie intertwines fact and fiction together in his narrative is through writing something of himself, and his own domestic situation, into the text. He describes Alan McDougall as a man who evidently "knew Burns and the Bible and John Bunyan very well, but he would not think of comparing himself in general culture with his wife Margaret who was in every way a very superior woman" (MS 975/195/1: 12[b]). This description of the fictional Alan's literary preferences leaves no doubt that he possesses quite distinct characteristics of Archie's, whose love of the poetry of Robert Burns and knowledge of the Bible is well known, and has already been discussed in previous chapters. However, it is not so well known that he was also familiar with the work of John Bunyan. The existence of a short pamphlet of a lecture given by Harry Goodenough to the League of Peace and Freedom on May 16, 1917, entitled *John Bunyan 1628-1688,* (The Pelican Press),[29] amongst Archie's papers in the Hocken Library would indicate that Bunyan's life and work were clearly of interest to him. Undoubtedly Bunyan's struggle against authoritative powers, which forbade and imprisoned him for preaching, was one which Archie could readily identify with through his own conscientious objection. The description of Margaret must also be based on Millicent, who with her privileged upbringing and university education was always considered more cultured than Archie, who was himself basically a self-educated farmer and labourer. Although Millicent wrote in her *Memoirs* that she knew many

[29] This particular item is filed in the MS 975/196 collection.

people had thought her marriage must have been rather like "the fairy tale of the princess and the peasant", it never bothered her: "what they didn't know was that Archie was the prince" (61). However, there is no disputing their different circumstances; even now, Terence Baxter still finds it hard to understand how his parents could have come from such vastly different backgrounds (personal interview, 13 June 2001).[30]

In his biography McKay states one of the reasons the McColl ancestors were supposed to have emigrated was because one of the sons, John McColl, was said to have been "a keen poacher and a violent man" (3). His family had apparently feared for his future. However, once he had settled in New Zealand and taken up farming, his gentle personality was thought to have been at odds with his former reputation (*ibid*). As McKay states, ancestors such as John McColl, were the stuff of legend for James and he came to see them as "the type of ancestor deprived of legitimate hunting rights by the land-owning gentry. He symbolized the difference between legality and morality" (*ibid* 3-4). James expressed this view in the chapter 'Conversation with an Ancestor' when the question is asked of him: "*Can you hide from the keepers in the bush?*" (*The Man on the Horse* 31). This is a reference to the gamekeepers who protected the new English game laws which had deprived many Scottish clans of their ancient hunting rights. Thus, in James's view "for a clansman the fault of poaching was a legal fault, not moral" (*ibid*). It was not unusual, he went on to say, for young men threatened by keepers to try to "shoot their way out of it." (*ibid*). According to McKay, this was exactly what John McColl's family feared—that "he might shoot a keeper and be transported or hanged" (*The Life of James K. Baxter* 3).

[30] As Terence Baxter made this comment to me prior to the commencement of our interview proper it does not appear on the tape or transcript.

Poaching is also suggested in Archie's novel as one of the main reasons for emigrating. The eldest of the McDougall sons, Dougald, he wrote, "was very active, very generous and above all reliable...[he was also] a daring and highhanded poacher who had baffled the wiles of the keepers for years" (MS 975/195/1: 4[a]). The fictional McDougall family feared, as did the real McColls, that their son would be transported, shot, or hanged. Archie describes an occasion where Dougald has taken his younger brother, Angus, shooting with him. Their shots, however, attract the attention of the gamekeepers. The brothers, finding themselves unable to outrun the keepers, turn and face them "with their guns ready" (*ibid* 5[a]). Angus is shaken by the ordeal, but Dougald stands "whistling softly while his blue eyes sparkled with merriment" (*ibid*). The keepers, however, fortunately have the "good sense...[to] keep more than a gunshot out of [Dougald's] way", and so they turn away and leave the brothers (*ibid* 5-6[a]). Thus, it is Dougald's own illegal behaviour, and his involving of his younger brother in such activities, that is instrumental in their father's decision to emigrate in order to allow the family to start a new life.

Although Dougald becomes good friends with a man in Dunedin known as John 'The Poacher', whose main activity is the brewing of whiskey in an illegal still, he does not return to his own former poaching activities. Instead, Dougald begins a new operation in the Otago goldfield area involving transporting essential supplies to miners. At times he journeys into remote areas with his teams of packhorses and bullocks in extremely hazardous winter conditions, realising that while it is a profitable venture for him, often many a miner's life was dependent on the provisions he could bring them. He tells some friends he is in the business of "supplying goods to diggers and I pass no starving man by whether he has the money or not" (MS 975/195/1:

61). His ability to reach the miners becomes quite legendary: "How he got to Gabriels [sic] Gully on the night in question remained a mystery but it was known that his horses had steel spikes in their shoes and that he had shod them with his own hands" (*ibid* 62). Dougald seems to be the archetypal pioneering man, tough and resourceful, and at the same time honest and reliable. He becomes, in fact, like his real life counterpart, John McColl, well respected and well liked.

In reality, Archie did have an uncle called 'Black Archie' who, according to McKay's biography, carried supplies to miners in the gold-fields (6). In Archie's story this fact is altered slightly as two of the McDougall brothers work this enterprise—Dougald, as already mentioned, together with his younger brother, Ewan, who possesses the skill with the bullock teams. Ewan's prowess in this area, and the teams themselves, are given considerable attention in the narrative, which, on the surface, seems rather unnecessary. However, to a pioneering community, the bullock teams were obviously essential; thus they would have been prized and looked after with great care. Olssen notes that the bullocks "provided a major source of power for transport...The 'bullockies' who drove the teams were highly-skilled and often cussedly independent" (73). James once wrote of the reformed poacher, John McColl, and bullock driver, 'Black Archie' in the poem "The First Forgotten":

> The green hill-orchard where
> My great-granduncle lived
> Is overgrown. No cache and no reprieve
>
> The chilly air holds. They come from the

Old lands, for hunger, or fearing the young
Would shoot from thicket a keeper,
Be transported or hung.

.....

One who drove a bullock team
In the gold-rush on an upland track.
One smiling and whistling softly
With a horseshoe behind his back.

(*Collected Poems* 30-1)

What becomes apparent is that this particular poem could also be seen as the story of Dougald and Ewan McDougall. Although it cannot be said that James used his father's novel for this poem, since he wrote the poem in 1944 (the novel was written four years later), it is obvious that these ancestral figures had already become legendary within the Baxter clan, and that their exploits were well known to their descendants. To an imagination such as the young James's, it would have been easier for him than it would for most people to see these ancestors in mythical or legendary terms, as the distinct similarities between the manuscript and James's poetry clearly indicate that previous generations had already considered them in such a manner.

These ancestors, and their sometimes illegal activities, are an integral part of the manuscript. The frequent references to, and the presence of, John 'The Poacher', throughout the novel is significant. His name, 'The Poacher', is clearly an allusion to the illicit, but not—according to the Scots—immoral practice of poaching in the Highlands. Just as the factual poachers had to use their wiles to elude the gamekeepers as they sought to provide their families with meat, so too, does 'The Poacher'. He constantly

moves his still around the countryside in order to avoid detection, so that he is able to supply the locals with the whiskey that seems to be a staple part of any of their social rituals. 'The Poacher' also possesses extra-sensory powers as he has the ability to foretell events before they occur. This may be a similar quality to that which Archie experienced and has already been referred to in the first chapter.[31]

The links between the factual Baxter and Archie's fictional McDougall clans continue as many other relatives are featured in his narrative. McKay writes that after their arrival in Dunedin the McColls spent the usual initial period at the immigrant barracks before moving to a farm at Brighton. Once established there Archibald McColl wrote to his brother, Duncan, who had remained in Ballachulish, to come out and settle at Brighton with them. Duncan apparently replied that he could not leave their elderly father (also named Duncan), who was then aged eighty-six. The elder Duncan told his son: " 'Don't be absurd, I'll come out with you' ", and so they did (*The Life of James K. Baxter* 4). McKay states that Duncan senior was a well-liked, hard-working, hard-drinking man, who later died as the result of a fall into a ditch at the age of ninety-four (*ibid*).

In Archie's novel these people become Ian McDougall, brother of Alan, who arrives in Dunedin with their "old father 'Shenner' " (MS 975/195/1: 14). "Shenner," Archie later informs us on page eighteen, means grandfather (the spelling of the word alternates throughout the manuscript between either "Shenner" or "Shennor." James spells it "Chennor"). In Archie's narrative this particular Shenner is indeed a hard-working old man who was "very active and lively"; but in something of a contrast to the real

[31] Refer to p 32 above.

life Duncan, this old man was "abstemious in his habits" (*ibid* 18). Shenner was, however, "at this time eighty six years of age and he did his share of work for another eight years" (*ibid*). Alan McDougall says to his wife, Margaret, "my father is as fit as a fighting cock. He told me how he had made a good supply of matches out of bracken fern before he left and he has made some fine thatching needles of the right kind of wood. He said that if they have to build a new house he means to thatch it himself" (*ibid* 15). Shenner's skill with thatching is an art referred to on many occasions throughout the novel. In reality this Shenner appears to have had a remarkable attraction for his descendants, as James also wrote of him:

> He wears a plaid over his shoulders and in his hand he carries large needles made of shiny black wood, such as the clan used for thatching their houses. A smallish wiry man, well into his eighties—it is, I think, Chennor, my great-great-grandfather, who came to this country when he was over eighty and lived for six or eight years afterwards.
>
> (*The Man on the Horse* 28)

This is the Chennor who speaks to James in Gaelic and proceeds to ask him the series of questions, one of which has already been referred to earlier in this chapter.[32] A further passage of interest concerning Archie's Shenner is the relationship he has with his young grandson, Fringal:

> It was into the eager youthful ears of this little boy that the aged Shenner poured a wealth of tradition that had been handed down from the centuries past. Shenner possessed in a marked degree what has been entitled 'the long memory of the Gael' and to find a ready and apt pupil in his little grandson was a source of comfort and pleasure to the old man in his last years. The

[32] Refer to p 107 above.

> little boy would sit beside his grandfather's chair and listen attentively for hours at a time to stories of the lives and doings of the people of the Western Highlands.
>
> (MS 975/195/1: 44)

This description is of interest as one wonders whether it is Archie who is the grandson, Fringal, and if this is how he himself became so knowledgeable, and so appreciative, of his ancestry. Another possibility may also be that Archie has in fact portrayed himself as Shenner and that it is his own son, James, who is Fringal, as there are many accounts of Archie sitting with the young James on his knee reciting poetry and other folklore to him. Terence Baxter clearly remembers seeing his father and his brother together in exactly this fashion on numerous occasions; his father enjoying sharing his knowledge, not only of poetry, and of his brother listening avidly and readily absorbing this information (personal interview, 13 June 2001).

Archie has also included his paternal grandfather's family in his narrative. As McKay has already noted in his biography in January 1861 the *Lady Egidia* sailed into Port Chalmers with a large number of passengers; on board was Archie's grandfather, John Baxter, who was accompanied by his wife, Mary, and their two children (2). After his arrival John Baxter, who was a very physically fit and able worker, tried his hand at a variety of jobs before he travelled to the gold-fields, and enjoyed considerable success at the Dunstan.[33] The journey, however, back to Dunedin with the gold was no doubt often a perilous one. On one such journey John Baxter was surrounded by a group of men, "but with the aid of a certain natural shrewdness and a

[33] This John Baxter should not be confused with his son, the hard-drinking John Baxter, who was Archie's father, whom James refers to in the poem "Grandfather" as "my looking glass twin".

gift with words, he spun the tale of a miner down on his luck and got free. He always believed the men were Burgess, Kelly, Sullivan, and Levy, a notorious gang of cut-throats, who murdered travellers for their gold" (*ibid* 3).[34]

In Archie's novel John Baxter becomes the fictional character, John McMillan, who does indeed arrive with his family on the *Lady Egidia.* McMillan goes to the gold-fields, initially to Gabriel's Gully, where he has some success (unlike the real John Baxter who had none there), and from there proceeds to the Dunstan area where he finds a substantial amount of gold. On a return trip home from this area McMillan has an encounter with a group of men, which must have been similar to John Baxter's experience. McMillan had stopped to rest and bathe his feet in a stream,[35] after which he sees four men acting rather furtively in the distance. He remains barefooted and when confronted by one of the men replies:

> "I have come from the Dunstan and if you have any thought of going there I advise you not to go without tools as I have done." "Did you get any gold?" asked the stranger and eyed McMillan keenly. "Not a colour," he answered. "How could I when I had nothing to dig with but my bare hands, but it serves me right for listening to people who know nothing about the Dunstan." "Where are you going now?" asked the stranger with a crooked side look. "I'm going right back to Dunedin to earn enough money to buy tools and it's a sad plight I'm in as you can see, barefooted and having to beg my

[34] This may be the same Burgess Eric Olssen refers to as "a miserable graduate of Australia's convict hulks who had helped rob a party of miners on the Maungatuas" (*A History of Otago* 60).

[35] This type of bathing by McMillan would have been totally in keeping with John Baxter's private habits, as according to Frank McKay, he was extremely fastidious about his personal hygiene. Apparently he was a keen swimmer and swum every day in a bay at Brighton, even during the winter, right up until the year before he died at the age of ninety-four (*The Life of James K. Baxter* 3).

> way." McMillan had never really stopped to talk but had kept moving all the time.
>
> (MS 975/195/2: 98)

While the lure of gold-fields is a prominent feature of the novel, and much of the excitement and the activity of the gold-rushes is portrayed, the central theme is, as Archie states in his letter to Charles Brasch, that of "living off the land." Throughout the novel there are indeed many expressions of the value that should be placed upon the land, rather than merely considering what could be extracted from it. It is a belief that Archie himself appears to have had. According to Terence Baxter, Archie often wrote his thoughts down on paper in order to get them properly sorted out in his mind (personal interview, 13 June 2001). There are several bits and pieces of paper with various things written on them amongst the Archibald Baxter collections held in the Hocken Library, some of which are mere scraps. One such fragment is in Archie's handwriting, but as it is unsigned its authorship cannot be accurately determined. Nevertheless, it is of interest as it articulates both a belief in the importance of the land, as well as a unifying sense of brotherhood that is an integral part of his novel:

> It has been said that prophecies work out their own fulfilment
> "Let us have land" they cried, their hearts on fire
> "Land for our sons' sons' sakes that they may live
> Close to the Earth in freedom and in peace
>
> (Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196)

It is unclear whether Archie intended this excerpt to be part of anything else, such as a poem or a speech, or if he was, as his son claimed, merely writing

his thoughts down at the time. The desire to "live close to the earth" is certainly an attitude Alan McDougall, in particular, expresses frequently throughout the narrative. At one stage he tells his brother, Ian, that "the gold diggings are the curse of the country, for they have made the young men restless, with no wish to settle down to work on the land as they should...there's more money in the country and more excitement and people are not satisfied with the good old way of living, and that's not the best thing for the country" (MS 975/195/2: 163). This was certainly not an uncommon attitude during the Otago gold-rush period. As Olssen notes: "On various occasions Cargill made it clear that he did not want gold discovered for, as he recognised, a gold-rush would destroy his New Edinburgh. Burns and Cargill[36] knew what had happened in California and Victoria...gold brought thousands of footloose, single, drunken, whoring, gambling young men...Gold miners pursued pleasure unredeemed by moral purpose" (56).

On another occasion Ian and Alan McDougall assist their sons with their ventures into the gold-fields by leading their packhorses to the diggings that were taking place in North Taieri. Neither of them was in favour of their sons taking part, but realised that gold-mining was seen as an exciting adventure by all the young men at the time. Alan and Ian, however, "would much rather have had them [their sons] all producing goods from the land. People were leaving the farms at a time when prices had never been better and neglected to attend to the real wealth of the country to hunt for gold which only a few would be lucky enough to find" (MS 975/195/1: 64). Undoubtedly this was true. As Olssen notes, prices for food and commodities soared during the gold-rushes, with many merchants, storekeepers, run hold-

[36] Captain William Cargill and the Reverend Thomas Burns were two Scottish elders of the new Otago community. They hoped to make this new settlement a very godly and moral one.

ers, and waggoneers, making "small fortunes" (58).

Archie's novel ends with a scene on New Year's eve where the entire McDougall clan and their close friends have gathered at Alan's farm for a day of celebrations which, apart from eating and drinking, includes many Highland traditions such as formal welcomes, the tossing of cabers, and playing of bagpipes. Alan's speech concludes the text:

> The Earth is the mother of every living thing. If you read the Book you will see that Adam was made out of the red earth and to the earth we must all return...The land can only give out what is in it and if it is poor to begin with, then it is your work to feed it as you would a lean horse till it grows strong. Everything that dies whether plant or animal and the dung from every living thing should go back into the land for nature meant it to be so.
>
> (MS 975/195/2: 177)

The emphasis placed on working the land, and on the Baxters as people of the soil, were also beliefs of James and are a feature of much of his literature; they are also subjects that will be dealt with more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Thus, with the existence of Archie's manuscript, it is apparent that, despite past critical opinion to the contrary, the mythological process did not begin with James, as his father's manuscript reveals not only that the legends surrounding the exploits of the Baxter and McColl clans had already been spun, but that these stories had also been handed down to subsequent generations in oral form. A rich store of ancestral heritage was therefore already present and was a legacy James was later able to capitalise on fully in much

of his own writing.

As can also be seen Archie's "fictional", unpublished novel does have many links with reality. As a result, when fact and fiction are drawn together, the effect is both interesting and illuminating: interesting, because a greater insight into the Baxter and McColl ancestry is revealed; and illuminating because it enables a fuller appreciation of the extent to which their forebears were well known to, and mythologised by, their later descendants, and this was a tradition that was to continue with both Archie and James.

Chapter 5

The Mythological *Horse*

James K. Baxter's desire to mythologise his ancestors follows a precedent already set by the previous Baxter and McColl generations who saw themselves and their lives as inextricably woven with the past. As has been shown in the previous chapter, Archie's unpublished novel highlights and develops many of the myths that had already assumed the status of folklore for the Baxter/McColl clans. The mythologising of his ancestral past was therefore something of a natural progression for James and it features in much of his poetry throughout his life. The posthumously published novel, *Horse*,[37] is also of interest as it reveals James's continued desire to not only associate himself with, and to mythologise the past, but also illustrates his need to continually link past and present, fact and fiction together, in much the same way as the previous Baxters had done orally, and which Archie had put into written form with his unpublished work.

These ancestors, or "the tribe" as he sometimes referred to them, were for James such an integral part of his being that he felt his life was something that could not be seen as separate from the past. His appreciation

[37] This text should not be confused with *The Man on the Horse*, a book comprised primarily from a series of lectures James K. Baxter delivered in 1966 as the Burns Fellow at the University of Otago.

of his ancestry was therefore very real, and in 1967 he wrote:

> The dead have now become a part of us,
>
> Speaking between our words, possessing all our dreams...
>
> ("The Sailor", *Collected Poems* 406)

The past, James imagined was something inescapable and, even when unsought, it reached forward and claimed the present as its own. He also stated: "our forgetting is too like amnesia. I think the god of death takes charge of us in spite of our innocence. We are unable to wholly opt out of history. By a process like osmosis, like seeping of water through gravel, the calamities in which we have not participated reach into our dreams" (*Jerusalem Daybook* [Wellington, Price Milburn, 1971], 8). Therefore the hardships, the sufferings, and the successes of his ancestors James imagined bore a direct relationship with those of his own life; thus he felt able to share in these other trials and tribulations. This ability meant that, in effect, he could appropriate whatever particular aspects he deemed necessary from the past and reinvent them to suit his own specific purposes. The novel, *Horse*, realises this desire as James builds on existing Baxter myths and legends, thereby making himself part of a new mythological canon.

Horse was written in the early 1960s and is a loosely autobiographical account of James's early life in Dunedin. It is an account which he claims is the story of "my collaborator, my schizophrenic twin, who has always provided me with poems. I see him as a Dunedinite. He, or somebody rather like him, inhabited this town twenty years ago, daring to use my name and wear my features" (*Horse* 122). It is therefore apparent that James considered his return to Dunedin as something akin to that of the prodigal son—

which in itself reveals a desire to view himself as part of a larger myth. As will be shown, he was happy to see himself in the role of an outcast, as it would have been a role which would further align him with his Baxter ancestors and increase his own sense of shared adversity.

Ancestral mythology is apparent from the outset of *Horse*. The most obvious factual ancestral figure is that of Archie, who is the father of the main protagonist, Timothy Harold Glass, otherwise known as Horse, who is himself based on the teenage James. Horse refers to his father as the "Old Man." When we first meet the Old Man he is feeding kitchen scraps to some hens in the garden. Horse is lying in bed with an ever-present hangover, and as he lies there "he could hear the clanking of a bucket in the kitchen at the bottom of the stairs. His father would be there, taking out a small drayload of lettuce leaves, soaked bread, meat bones, potato peelings and tea leaves to the gorged hens" (2). This is obviously the same figure referred to later in the poem 'To my Father in Spring', (1966):

> ...You carry
> a kerosene tin of soft
>
> bread and mutton bones to the
> jumping hens that lay their eggs
> under the bushes slily...
>
> (*Collected Poems* 365)

On this particular occasion, however, as Horse lies there, he knows that as he has failed his exams, he is thus in for a showdown with his mother, who is of course, Millicent. "Your mother went to Cambridge. It did her no harm. You've got to try and understand her Timothy. She wants to see you do

well," the Old Man tells his son (3). Cambridge was indeed one of the universities Millicent had attended. Once Timothy/ Horse has had the inevitable clash of wills with his mother, he later emerges from it very upset: "when Horse was right out of sight of the house, sitting on the bare earth under one of McArthur's gum trees...he realized he was shaking all over. He burst into tears" (11). As Frank McKay observes in his biography, in reality James did indeed have "a difficult session" with his parents regarding his education, and when he emerged from it, he "'wept under a gum-tree on the river-flat below the house.'" (79). There must have been quite considerable pressure put on James to follow a particular path, especially from Millicent, as according to Terence Baxter:

> She wanted things to go her way, a certain amount, in the bigger ways of life, more or less, as to what we did...She was probably disappointed in me because I just went and just worked in an ordinary sort of way, without, you know, university or anything like that at all. She obviously could see that I wasn't exactly all that bright, or whatever you call it. But...with him, you see, she...put her sights on him. So he probably knew this, too. Which made it a bit heavier on him than...if I'd gone along the way she would have liked. Even though she was fond of me, she loved me, and all that sort of thing, right from my childhood. But...the pressure came on him a wee bit to...come up to her expectations, you see. And through him knowing this...she made it probably a bit obvious sometimes, I suppose. I don't know [about her] actually saying it to him---may have—and so he sort of rebelled.
>
> (personal interview, 13 June 2001)

Millicent was aware of James's desire to rebel, and felt that in doing so, he

was becoming a hobo. There was certainly some truth in what she said, as James himself later confirmed much of this, referring to this "other self" as his "collaborator, my schizophrenic twin" (*Horse* 122), who he claimed, "did not mind living off the land. A natural hobo, he had often scrounged the quarter-smoked lipstick-reddened cigarettes from the sand-trays in the foyer of the Regent picture theatre" (*ibid* 43-4). This "scrounging" was in fact exactly what he did do during his late teens in Christchurch. According to McKay, when James had no money available for necessaries such as food, clothing, and warmth, he was quite prepared to go without and did pick up and smoke used cigarette butts (*The life of James K. Baxter* 110-11).

The hobo, Horse, is also yet another manifestation of James's desire to emulate his often marginalised ancestors. Vincent O'Sullivan states in his biography "Baxter had no difficulty in...accepting the role of the hunted man, the outcast, the man tested by extremity" (54). James was obviously well aware of the picture he must have often presented to others, since not only is he realised in the figure of Horse, but also as the drunken lecturer, Grummet. Trixie Te Arama Menzies is quite correct when she writes that, with the character of Grummet, James offers a "brilliant self-satirising set piece" of himself (*Landfall*, 160. vol. 40, no. 4, December 1986: 515). Furthermore, to ensure that the reader does not fail to see this point, Grummet actually quotes one of James's own poems, "The Raspberry Hut",[38] to Horse and asks him " 'Have you ever been in the Matukituki Valley?' "[39], which is of course, part of the title of another of James's poems (*ibid* 516). The result of seeing himself as these characters is that James could then re-enact the trials of his forebears by illustrating how he, too, could "rough it" and do with-

[38] See *Collected Poems* p 236.
[39] See *Collected Poems* pp 86-7.

out comforts just as they had; an experience which would allow him to establish an even closer sense of tribal affiliation with them.

Prior to Horse's showdown with his mother, the Old Man turns to him and quotes a fragment of Burns: "his father habitually quoted Burns in times of crisis" (*Horse* 3). In reality Archie did quote Burns on many occasions, not just in times of crisis. James himself recalled a time when Archie had quoted Burns after a social visit had pleased him greatly. Archie had apparently quoted the excerpt from "Tam o' Shanter" where Care is personified: "Care, mad to see a man sae happy,/ E'en drowned himsel amang the nappy" (*The Man on the Horse* 104). According to James, Scottish readers most often quote this section because the burdens and struggles of life are forgotten momentarily with the appearance of "group love" and "the collective warmth of the tribe" (*ibid* 104-5).

James, too, sought to associate and identify himself with the work of Robbie Burns, not only because he considered Burns to be "alone among the post-Reformation poets in his capacity for genuine bawdry" (*ibid* 96), but because he considered his Baxter and McColl ancestors to be, like Burns, people of the soil. This is also another reason why Archie was so fond of Burns. Mary Ellen Brown, in detailing the many facets which comprised Burns's popularity, writes he was "a man of the people...rooted in agricultural class, he remained true to his environment, wrote about the ordinary and everyday things of life understood by all" (83). Brown also describes how Burns's ability to appeal to all classes gave rise to many popular depictions, some of which show him dressed somewhat incongruously in middle class clothes (thus appealing to the literati) while standing behind a plough, thereby highlighting his ability to remain close to his humble origins. The role of ploughman was seen as significant as it indicated a closeness to "the

'soul', the 'roots' of a nation" and Burns himself readily embraced the notion (*ibid* 91).

In *Horse,* the association with the soil is also an important one, and it is of significance that when we first meet the Old Man/Archie he is feeding kitchen scraps to the hens, thus putting something back into the earth (as the Alan McDougall of Archie's unpublished novel claims one should do), and he is later to be seen digging in the garden. The Old Man tells Horse: "A man's got to work at something, I earned half-a-crown a week when I started ploughing for old Runciman" (*ibid*), which was in fact what Archie had to do. There is no doubt that James equated both his father and his hardworking Baxter ancestors with the soil and physical activity.

As Millar shows in his thesis, the importance of manual labour and working with the land was something James also expressed in a letter he wrote to Noel Ginn:

> Men [such] as my father, ...[of] whom none have greater integrity or peace of mind, have progressed further and become, vertebrate, self-dependent without suffering. He was a ploughman, road-contractor, and farmer. There is a great sanity comes when one is working with one's hands...
>
> (415)

James had earlier clarified his curious use of the term "vertebrate" in another letter to Ginn in October 1943, which Millar also documents:

> There are two types of human—vertebrate and invertebrate...The invertebrate...has internal strife and true introversion. Like all shell-fish—no pun intended—it develops a shell, a shell of cynicism, fashion, perhaps even intellectual brilliance; it is sensitive but self-centred. The vertebrate...has in

> him morality—no mere rigid structure but a natural growth. If 'objective' he may be of the crude type, but 'subjectivity' is his true line of development. I don't consider myself a vertebrate.
>
> (*ibid*)

This is an impression James sought to associate himself with also, and, as Millar shows, in some ways, he sought to emulate his father: "I wish to be a sensitive and balanced adult. Daddy is this: and I have much of his nature in me" (Millar 417). There is also no doubt that he enjoyed farm life and liked to see himself as at one with nature. According to McKay, he once wrote to his mother declaring that life on Wanaka Station was "much more satisfying than the town. Just to walk along the mountain, look down at the lake, round up sheep, smell, hear, see, is more than work as love is more than sex" (*The Life of James K. Baxter* 87). W.H. Oliver states in his biography that James enjoyed the Otago landscape he had been brought up in, and that for him it was "for the rest of his life, a vision of Eden" (22). James later wrote that in his younger days " 'when I was a child I loved the world, the one God made, water, air earth, trees, what have you' " (*Jerusalem Daybook* 52). As Millar has shown in his thesis, during the course of James's correspondence with Ginn he wrote down some "thoughts concerning a career", a copy of which was later deposited in the Hocken Library (416). In this short essay James stated:

> In nature, in the mere sight of the natural world, in looking over wide distances, I find a self-delighting peace. Similarly in the physical achievement and physical pride of work. This is the primary source of my poetry...The shape and colour, and the life of Nature, is the very stuff of poetry.
>
> (*ibid* 416-17)

The poem, "The Garden", written slightly earlier when James was fifteen, reiterates his belief that through the physical experience of working alongside nature and the soil, a sense of inner peace and true freedom could then be achieved:

I saw a garden, in a wilderness,
Walled round with massive battlements and towers
Where the bright blooming of a thousand flowers
Beamed on the sunny air; ...

.....

And there were men who walked among the groves,
Who breathed the fragrance of the summer air;
But on their brows was sealed the mark of care –
They found no peace in that Elysium;

.....

Then at each fresh departure those who stayed
Within that garden prison close confined
Caught some dim glimpse of regions yet unknown,
The regions of the spirit and the mind –
For one brief instant then the scales fell down
From their blind eyes; and they could see
The beauty that unnurtured round them lay;
From their lethargic care they set them free:
So then they tilled the leafy soil
And decked the garden by their toil
Until they found their peace in labouring.

("The Garden",
James K. Baxter Notebooks. MS 704-A/2: 10-11)

Thus the "spirit and the mind" remain closed and imprisoned, and the eye

cannot see, if an appreciation and a desire to work at one with nature is not present. This poem encapsulates the balance of the "vertebrate" character who possesses the "morality" and "natural growth" James refers to in his correspondence with Ginn, and which is personified in the figure of Archie, whom James considered to have had great "integrity" and "peace of mind" through a lifelong association with the soil and labouring.

The impression of James as a writer in touch with the people and their roots is thus one that he actively encouraged, and it has gained increasing currency over the years, as the cover of the posthumously published edition, *Cold Spring,* illustrates.[40] This is an edition of previously unpublished early works, many of which were written during the period portrayed in *Horse.* The front cover of *Cold Spring* features a well-known photograph of James wearing working clothes and boots, sitting on an old cart in a farm paddock at Mt. Aspiring, Wanaka, with a notebook and pen in his hand, obviously in the act of composition. Despite his more suitable working attire, the coupling of James with the Burnsian tradition of a poet in touch with the roots of the nation is unmistakable. He once stated how he considered that the role of a poet should be one that reflected the views of the people, rather than politicians; and that the work itself should contain some "moral truth" (McKay, ed. *James K. Baxter as a Critic,* [Auckland, Heinemann Educational Books, 1978], 10). Vincent O'Sullivan writes that "from his mid-twenties, Baxter felt that his role, as much as anything, was to be that of a social commentator. As a young man he wrote, 'One of the functions of artists in a community is to provide a healthy and permanent element of rebellion; not to become a species of civil servant' " (5).

[40] Millar, Paul, ed. *James K. Baxter: Cold Spring.* Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1996.

There is no doubt that James sought to mythologise his father further by actively attempting to draw such parallels between Archie and Burns. Burns, James wrote, "was no poet of the middle class, but a struggling peasant farmer, closely aware of the domestic, social and economic burdens that rested on his own back and the backs of his neighbours" (*James K. Baxter as a Critic* 130). James also sought to apply this description to Archie in the essay 'Aspects of Poetry in New Zealand' where he quotes two of Archie's poems.[41] The first he described as emulating the English Romantics. However, the second poem, he claimed, was aimed at a local audience and is written in the mode of "Burns's pastoral satire; the vocabulary is square-cut New Zealand farmer's language" (*ibid* 72). The poet—and in this case Archie— is thus in touch with the people, with local events, language, and tradition. And, as Millar shows, James considered an appreciation of Burns to be essential, and those who could not do so "because he [Burns] is on the whole traditional and sentimental is in my eyes a literary lost soul" (247).

The poetry of Robbie Burns is featured in *Horse* when the Old Man comments on the clash (one which James himself felt keenly) that existed between the working and middle- to upper-classes. The Old Man says: " '*They gang in stirks and come out asses*[42]...a stirk's a steer. A bullock.' His father's eye would light up with the joy of the Scotsman commenting obliquely on the facts of life. 'The Varsity men are nothing but educated bullocks. That's what Burns thought about it' " (3). As Millar notes, this is one of the two occasions when James quotes this particular excerpt from

[41] The two poems are "Spirits of Harmony, Music, and Love" and "Protest to the Taieri County Council." Both poems are included in the Archibald McColl Baxter Papers, MS 975/196, Hocken Library, Dunedin. For a fuller discussion of both of these poems refer to pp 43-5 and pp 41-2 above.

[42] This excerpt is from Burns's "Epistle to J. Lapraik".

Burns; the other is on page seventeen of *The Man on the Horse* (34). Millar further claims James approved of Burns's disparagement of academics, such as his maternal grandfather John Macmillan Brown, because Macmillan Brown represented the more patrician ancestral side James was always uncomfortable with (*ibid*). As Millar also observes, James later indicated this in the introduction he wrote to his grandfather's *Memoirs*:[43]

> I am haunted by this ancestral voice which insists that the intellectual and moral betterment of mankind is achievable and should be every sane man's goal and concern.
>
> (*ibid* 76)

According to Millar James began to differentiate quite clearly between what he perceived to be his grandfather's intellectual, and thus manufactured, knowledge and his father's innate, and therefore natural, wisdom:

> ...knowledge is not wisdom, 'tis a tool
> That wise men use to make their words express
> The thoughts that teem within the busy brain.
> Thou [Wisdom] shinest oft where Peace and Quiet dwell,
> Far from the worldly turmoil and the strife;
> Not in the minds of busy clerk or judge,
> For they have knowledge but they cannot see,
> But in the simple lives of kindly men.
>
> ("Wisdom and Knowledge", qtd. in Millar 77)

James's negativity towards the Macmillan Browns no doubt also stemmed from the fact that it did not suit the image of a working-class poet of the peo-

[43] *The Memoirs of John Macmillan Brown.* Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1974.

ple to have aristocratic connections.

James's paternal grandfather is also alluded to in *Horse* when Timothy tells his mother he is not going to return to university: "Horse, the redhot stovesitter, the boy with the glass belly, had hurled the grenade" (8). This is an obvious reference to John Baxter, whom James refers to sympathetically in the poem "Grandfather" as "his looking glass twin":

> I remember you,
> grandfather, at the trembling kitchen range...
>
> (*Collected Poems* 378)

A sense of shared affinity is once again established with the Baxter forebears, and it is obvious that James was more at ease with this side of his parentage.

The desire to mythologise and identify with the Baxter/McColl ancestors in *Horse,* in the same manner with which Archie had previously done in his manuscript, is reinforced with the impression of shared experience outside the law. The crown-and-anchor game referred to in *Horse* has obvious similarities with the illicit whiskey distilling described in Archie's manuscript, where the game is acknowledged as illegal, but not immoral, as it is in fact tolerated by all:

> The door opened... 'All right. You can come in. We had the johns here on Monday. Joe had to give them thirty quid to get them to go away again'...They entered a small smoke-filled room...It was nearly as crowded as the bar of the Grand had been.
>
> (*Horse* 31-2)

The game is therefore seen in the same light as 'The Poacher's' whiskey in Archie's text, where all the characters are aware that their whiskey has been brewed illegally, but choose to ignore the fact. They all enjoy 'The Poacher's' whiskey, and pronounce it to be the best "drop" around, just as the patrons at Joe's place take pleasure in the illicit crown-and-anchor game.

One of the most overt references in *Horse* to the Baxter Scottish heritage occurs in the chapter 'The Quick and the Dead.' In this chapter Horse wakes with a massive hangover, yet again, only to find that "he knew that he, Timothy Harold Glass, had poisoned the tribal wells" (*Horse* 38). This sense of tribalism was without doubt important to James, as he once claimed to

> have seen inwardly my first ancestors in this country, those Gaelic speaking men and women, descending with their bullock drays and baggage to cross the mouth of what is now the Brighton river...Those people whose bones are in our cemeteries, are the only tribe I know of.
>
> (*The Man on the Horse* 12)

This sense of needing to identify with a tribe, and thus become part of the legends and myths associated with it, is one reason why he later so readily identified with Maoridom and decided to take the name of 'Hemi'. Frank McKay claims in his introduction to *James K. Baxter as a Critic* that, for James, the ancient Scottish clan myths became fused together with Maori experience of tribal break-up and dispossession, and that this fusion was realised in the *Jerusalem* books (xv). This claim is reinforced by James/Hemi's own statement that: "The tribal love transfused into my veins begins to give me strength" (*Jerusalem Daybook* 39). A few pages later he

wrote: "It is one thing to propose a philosophy. It is another thing to try and find a tribe" (*ibid* 45). He also once described the Baxter/McColls as "the closely-knit Otago tribes of my father's family" (*The Man on the Horse* 123). A sense of belonging and shared experience was thus very important to James throughout his life, and was an association he actively sought. As Alan Riach in his essay 'Baxter & the Dialect of the Tribe' writes, "perhaps the most important thing about the role Baxter adopted was his conscious choice of a tribal context for it. Throughout his life, Baxter chose deliberately and selectively to privilege certain aspects of social identity which could be described as tribal" (*Opening the Book,* Williams & Leggot eds [Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1995], 112). Paul Millar concurs with Riach's opinion as in his introduction to *New Selected Poems: James K. Baxter* (Auckland, Oxford University Press, 2001), he writes, "Baxter was by nature tribal. He affiliated with small, tightly knit groups, whose cohesion was generally a function of persecution and alienation, and identified with various tribal manifestations" (xv).

Despite the need to establish his own sense of tribalism, in typically ambivalent fashion there is also no doubt that, on occasion, it suited James to adopt the role of outcast. When Horse/James considers he has fallen from grace when he has "poisoned the tribal wells" (38) he sees himself as something of a black sheep. He envisages the particularly significant forces in his life all coming together to meet him: "Old men in tartan kilts with bagpipes under their arms, housewives with faces as long as their aprons, the dead and living burghers of Dunedin accompanied by their apple-cheeked women and their sub-normal Sunday-loving children" (38). Although he regarded Dunedin as the home of Eden-like childhood enjoyment, James also perceived it to be a bastion of the Puritanism which he, along with many

other writers, viewed as the repressive denial of life and naturalness within New Zealand society. As McKay notes in his introduction to *James K. Baxter as a Critic,* in "Pig Island Letters", James does in fact refer to Dunedin as "Calvin's Town" (x-xi). And W.H. Oliver observes that James's later poem, "A Small Ode on Mixed Flatting," was a direct prod at Dunedin's strict moral climate which forbade mixed flatting at the time. An accompanying illustration for the poem in a journal also shows the two moral polarities that existed in Dunedin (and which created a constant sense of tension for James), represented by the sensual figure of Robbie Burns alongside the Puritan founder Thomas Burns (106-7). James thus considered Puritanism to be the serpent in his Eden (*ibid* 20).

In *Horse,* repression in the guise of religion is characterised by the aptly named, androgynous Zoe Virtue, who lives in a "habitable box of metal and glass...many of the Church of the Extreme Left regarded...as a shrine" (90). Horse refers to it as "Virtue Castle" and states how "anyone who stood at the kitchen sink had the illusion of being in the open air" (90). Thus the impression is not one of spaciousness or beauty, but of an empty void. Horse is also quick to point out that the Virtues have no children. Zoe's husband, Gordon, we are told, "had long ceased to visit her in her separate bedroom" (98). Although Zoe was brought up as a "cloudy Methodist", her Calvinistic husband "had converted her to the austere dogmatism of the Extreme Left. She had no doubt whatever that in less than forty years she would be dead for good" (97-8), as religion has already deadened her inside, and what is left is merely a barren and repressed shell. Later, when Horse relates to Grummet his version of the sexual interlude he has with Zoe, and how he offended her with his truthfulness, Grummet plays on the connotations derived both from her surname and its association with godli-

ness, as he remarks: "Honesty is a difficult virtue" (116).

Although most of James's ancestors were religious, the discomfort with Puritanism is yet another way in which he could identify with his forebears. Here too, it seemed, was a struggle against a superior, yet often unseen, authority which cast its shadow over society as a whole. Puritanism, he felt, was a method of the conformist societal control that rejected artistic freedom, and viewed any writer who deviated from the norm as deviant themselves (*James K. Baxter as a Critic* xi). James fought against this conformist control throughout his life—as had Archie and his brothers when they had maintained their conscientious stance during a time when the majority of New Zealanders were gripped by nationalistic fervour.

As has already been stated, James had often mythologised Archie in his poetry, and there are also many other examples of this in *Horse*. At one point he writes that the "tenets of the Horse religion" gave Horse "access to a sacred power" (49-50). Horse is unsure where this power actually stems from, other than that it is in some way connected with "Lucifer the Earth-Spirit, since the God he had heard of was a God of ideas" (50). It is a power Horse associates with particular places and people, one of which is his father: "His father conveyed it strongly, by the capable strength of his hands, and by the smell of burnt gum-leaves he often carried on his person" (50). Terence Baxter does not actually recall Archie having done this at all, but writes:

> I think that maybe some old relitive [sic] did so & that my brother brought that into his novel. My father may have told my brother about an old uncle or someone who carried gumleaves on his person & my brother may have got the idea from that.
>
> (letter to author, 18 October 2001)

As has already been mentioned, there is a marked contrast between the way in which James lionised the Baxter/McColls and the disparagement shown toward the Macmillan Browns in *Horse*, who are seen as stifling and repressive—much like the Puritans. All ancestors, or "the Dead" according to Horse, could be divided into two categories. On the one hand "there were those who had enjoyed having a bang while they were alive, or would have if they had had the chance. With these green-boned ancestors Horse communed when he was on the grog" (52). There is no doubt this desire to celebrate bawdiness and revelry derives from the Burnsian-loving Baxter/McColls. Their enjoyment of a drop of whiskey, and in some cases, overindulgence, was already legendary. As Millar has demonstrated in his thesis, Terence Baxter considered Archie to be extremely tolerant of his poet son and "admired practically anything that my brother wrote"; whereas Millicent might "take issue with the tone or content" (36). Terence claimed that "my father was a little more broad minded, [he] would give a little bit of a grin about it, or note that he [James] might be sailing a bit close to the wind," but still remained supportive of his son (*ibid*). Archie's tolerance of a more earthy type of humour is alluded to in *Horse* when Horse recalls "how his father had had to dig up the septic tank after the MacLennans had rented the house in the holidays. It was blocked by about fifty condoms that looked just like tomato skins. Now, whenever the MacLennans were mentioned, the Old Man was accustomed to refer obliquely to this mystery" (10).

The other "Dead" category is undoubtedly an allusion to the globe-trotting, educated Macmillan Browns. These ancestors "had enjoyed the dullest parts of Virgil; they had travelled round the world and noticed only the scenery; they had begotten children without joy; and they retained their hold over the living by the injunctions of newspaper leaders, advertisements

against bad breath, Travel Bureaus and Varsity lecture rooms" (*Horse* 52-3).

Thus the two ancestral branches are represented. As Millar notes, it is between these two polarities that James always felt a sense of conflict: "the tribe versus modern society, wisdom versus knowledge" (77). He was never comfortable with the Macmillan Brown side of his heritage and always sought to distance himself, in particular, from his grandfather John Macmillan Brown. This was partly due to the fact that, like Horse, he found he had nothing in common with them, and especially because in reality his grandfather "had not considered his loved father a suitable son-in-law" (*ibid* 34).

As can be seen *Horse* is just one text in an anthology of ancestral myth and legend. It is apparent that the previous Baxter/McColl generations had, over a period of time, interwoven fact and fiction, past and present, and in doing so created their own unique discourse—a tradition James sought to continue with *Horse*. It is a text that allowed James to create new myths and to build upon those already in existence. The most effective and comprehensive way he could achieve the empathetic affinity he desired with his ancestors was to appropriate their existing myths and then reinvent them to suit his own purposes. The continual revising of the family legends was in fact much the same process as that which Archie—and indeed the previous Baxter forebears—had undertaken previously. Undoubtedly a sense of tribal affiliation and belonging was always necessary to James, thus it was important to him that he should celebrate his Scottish heritage; a need that was later to be realised in his desire to embrace Maoridom and Catholicism. *Horse* is, as Te Arama Menzies claims, part of a labyrinth (515), and I find such a description to be extremely apt, as Horse never ceases to wander around a complicated maze of mythology, from which neither he, nor James, could ever quite escape.

Conclusion

Archie Baxter was obviously a person of deep conviction who remained constant to his own very high principles and values, and as a result, the mana he commanded amongst his family and friends was substantial. This standing, combined with his considerable powers of persuasion, meant that he had the ability to affect those around him to a more than usual extent—and this is no more apparent than with the particularly close relationship he shared with his son James. Terence Baxter's own conscientious objection, which was, as Millar states in his thesis, the result of a prolonged period of immersion with his family's pacifist beliefs (18), is in itself a realisation of the effect of Archie's personality and beliefs. Therefore it is logical to assume, and indeed it is abundantly clear, that this influence was extended to James also, as he had once likened ancestral experience and knowledge to a process of "osmosis".[44]

Without doubt Archie's beliefs had filtered through to James, and this is what Harold Bloom refers to as the normal "transmission of ideas".[45] Although James himself does mention that the personality of his father (and his mother) were both influential to him, it does not seem likely that this was so in the Bloomian sense of the word. As has been shown, Archie was not a strong precursor, therefore James did not need to struggle with his father in the manner defined by Bloom. The suggestion of any sort of a poetic struggle is far more likely to have been experienced in the tense literary relationship James shared with Allen Curnow—which is another question

[44] Refer to p 120 above.
[45] Refer to p 73 above.

altogether, and outside the scope of this present discussion.

Although Archie's conscientious objection and his pacifist beliefs did become quite well known to the wider New Zealand public, he was obviously still a private person, who did not like to discuss his feelings openly, and this reserve unfortunately has had a rather detrimental effect on his writing. While Archie enjoyed poetry and remained conversant with it throughout his life, and his ability was much admired by his family, his verse lacks the passion of his son's, who in contrast to his father was always extremely forthcoming when writing of himself. Archie remained steadfast and unwavering in his beliefs. However, this same sense of single-mindedness was then realised in a uniformity of his verse, and in something of a paradox, the presence of his complete belief and passion for a particular set of ideals thus ensured his verse lacked the constant tension generated by a range emotions essential for poetic creativity—a quality readily apparent in the poetry of James. Much of the creative tension evident in James's work was derived from the fact that he always felt divided by the diverse ancestral heritage he received from the Baxters and the Macmillan Browns. As Paul Millar states, James imagined these ancestors as representing the opposite polarities of "wisdom versus knowledge", and the "tribe versus modern society".[46] In addition to these particular binary opposites, the friction generated from James's perception of the difference between nature and artifice, and an illicit act as opposed to an immoral one, is also a characteristic feature of much of his verse.

An appreciation of Archie's poetry is highly relevant to an understanding of that of his son. Although it is clear that Archie has always been

[46] Refer to p 137 above.

seen as an important factor in his son's life, and much of James's published verse supports this claim, past criticism of Archie is inadequate as it does not address the part his own literature played in the augmentation of his son's literary career. Apart from Millar's mention in his thesis of Archie's poetry, and his decision to publish some of Archie's poems in his thesis appendices, Archie's verse has never really been studied in detail, therefore the close literary relationship evident between Baxter father and son has remained unnoticed. The sense of affinity James shared with his father and his pacifist beliefs is obvious given the marked prevalence of pacifist literature in James's manuscript notebooks. While this verse has in the past been acknowledged as the imitation it undoubtedly was, the imitative source must be Archie with his particular leanings towards pacifism, as well as his preference of the Romantic tradition. James's early verse such as "The Curse of War", "The Brook", and "Spirit of God", are all very close approximations of his father's belief in pacifism and imitate his Romantic style, and even uses much of the same language as that which appears notably in Archie's poem "Spirits of Harmony, Music, and Love". The reiteration of Archie's beliefs and the emulation of his style apparent at the outset of James's literary career—from some of the very first poems he wrote during his childhood at the age of eight—which is the reason why I have argued that Archie is a significant link in James's poetic development from this time, rather than that of the slightly later time-frame of adolescence which Millar suggests.

Although it has perhaps been suggested otherwise, pacifism always remained an important theme and belief for James, and he wrote in the pacifist vein throughout his literary career. It was one way in which he could use his art as a form of protest as Burns, who was an important figure to

both Baxters, had also done. Archie's interest in Burns stemmed from the fact that he liked Burns's actual poetry itself, the way in which his verse was of the people and for the people, so that those who read or heard it could readily identify with it, and were thus inspired and given great pleasure. James enjoyed Burns for much the same reasons, but also because Burns reflected his own desire to be considered as a poet of the people. Burns epitomised for him the oneness with nature and the soil he considered necessary for poetic inspiration, and this was also an association he drew with his Baxter forebears. The ability to remain in contact with the land and the people was a quality which James imagined made his ancestors more genuine or true to themselves, which is why he actively sought to link both himself and his father with Burns and Burnsian tradition, rather than with those who did not labour in the physical sense, like the Macmillan Browns.

There is no question that James also believed his literary ability to have been derived from his father, and in poems such as "The Poetic State" and "To my Father" he pays tribute to Archie's encouragement and guidance towards his poetic and personal development. Most of this literature was composed at what can be seen as a crucial period of James's life, which was during Terence's confinement. This was a time when James envisaged the Baxter clan to be once again under threat from authoritarian oppression and it is obvious that he felt history was repeating itself once more with Terence's ordeal. As can be seen by the nature of the poetry and the letters he wrote about Terence at this time, it was an extremely painful period for James and it had the effect of drawing him further towards his Baxter ancestors, and away from the Macmillan Browns who, because of their more patrician background, represented authority and repression.

Archie's unpublished manuscript novel is without doubt a valuable

source for any discussion of Baxter mythology. As has been demonstrated, it contains a wealth of information regarding the Baxter/McColl ancestors; and many of their exploits, which were previously known only in passing with James's literature, are actually shown in far more depth in Archie's text. The fact that Archie wrote his novel far earlier than Millicent's account suggests is important as it reveals that this novel was actually a source of information well known to James for some time, and was readily available for him to drawn on for his own work should he choose, and I am of the opinion that undoubtedly he did. An insight into the sense of ancestry that was very much a part of the Baxter family's lives can be gleaned from Archie's novel, as it shows how mythologising was very familiar to them; their myths and legends had long traditions; and although James has been said to have had enough imagination to mythologise them, Archie's manuscript clearly shows that this had already been done many times before. Previously it has been assumed that because this mythology had not been written of until James had done so, somehow it did not exist. However, Archie's manuscript clearly shows the error of such an assumption. Baxter mythology was in fact a well-established practice in the clan itself and had been for generations.

Mythologising was certainly something James was accomplished in, as his novel, *Horse,* illustrates. The Baxter ancestors are revisited once more in this text and James builds on the existing myths, adding himself to them in the process. In imagining himself as the outcast character of Horse he could then write of himself as the same sort of marginalised figure he felt many of the Baxters had often been in the past. Thus, he was able to link their past inextricably with his present, and in doing so, was able to further develop the sense of tribal affinity with them, which was always so important to him.

Although Archie's poetry and prose were obviously never of the same calibre as his son's, his literature is still important as it is clearly the source of much of James's. While Archie's work has virtually been ignored in the past, its contribution to New Zealand arts and letters is of significance as it holds the key to a greater comprehension of the poetry and prose of one of our most recognised and acclaimed writers, James K. Baxter, whose importance to the New Zealand literary canon is unquestionable; and as such, it is essential to have the most well-rounded and complete picture available for any study of his work. Archibald Baxter's literature is therefore of obvious relevance as it offers a unique insight into the formative years of a poet who has continued to remain one of our most popular literary figures for over fifty years.

Appendix I

Poems by Archibald Baxter

The following is a selection of poems referred to in the main body of this thesis which have not, as yet, been quoted in full. Poems already quoted in their entirety in the text are not included in this appendix.

Burns

How great is he who can a nation sway!
Or all the nations of the world as one
Illume, yea to each corner shed a ray;
Whose brilliance likes the glory of the sun
All lesser lights beholding fade away
Nor shine again till his bright course is run:
To such a man a tribute would I pay –
To Robert Burns; and well we know that none
Of Scotland's sons of genius with all their arts
Him touched like him the finest chords of human hearts.

His living lyre to nature ever true
Awakes such echos in the hearts of men
As bid their souls aspire to dare and do
And nobly play their part in life: and when
To love he tuned its strings how well he knew

The master touch; and to the pure refrain
All nature gives her harmony and hue,
And Poesy bonds with her golden chain
The goodly sheaf of love 'twas hers to reap
And with the name of Burns for evermore to keep.

MS704-A/10

Great Universe, How Vast

Great universe, how vast
The fashion of thy spheres;
What know we of thy past
Or future countless years?

How shall we understand
Who measure space by miles
The wonder-moving Hand
That lit those aweful piles?

In their eternal sweep,
They worlds of flood or flame
In murmur music-deep
All whisper one great Name.

Thou mortal frame, and frail
Dust of this earthen shell,

Here make – thou canst not fail –

Thy heaven or they hell.

O drowsy soul awake!

Breathe deep of Heaven's breath,

Of that true life partake:

So live and fear not death.

MS 975/196

Hail Rock and Pillar Thou

Hail Rock and Pillar thou

Who high against the blast

Dost set thy fearless brow

So oft with clouds o'ercast.

To sing of thee I call

On no inspiring elf

For why thou after all

Art something like myself.

They heart like mine was rent

And torn, and still 'tis full

But here we're different

Thy head is mighty cool.

MS 975/196

Loud calls the Voice of Reason

Loud calls the voice of Reason
"Awake! O earth awake!"
But though the mountains shake
Deep-rooted stands the treason,
The tyranny and wrong
Of Man against Mankind –

The millions still are blind.

Pride, Avarice, Ambition,
Have plunged the world in war
And writ their names in gore:
Darkness and Superstition,
The horrors of the Past
No blacker page reveal
With wounds no balm can heal.

But through the orient portals
The world's true conqueror comes
Without the beat of drums-
"Peace and Goodwill to mortals!"
The message was of old,
Is now, and still shall be
Till all Mankind are free.

O My Brothers

O my brothers! O my brothers!
Will ye be for ever [sic] slaves? –
See your fathers and your mothers
Sinking down into their graves,
Ground by toil and crushed by sorrow
While the flag of Mammon waves!

Ever shall our sons and daughters
Through the flame to Moloch go
Till the Voice of many waters
Rending heaven thunders "No!"
And the War-God writhes and shudders
At his final overthrow!

MS 975/196

Protest to the Taieri County Council

I am a son of honest toil
These many years I've turned the soil
Have fought the fight and took the spoil
These hills afford
And oft tho' I did sorely broil

I've mostly scored.

In all these gullies I've made bridges
From great trees split by maul and wedges
I've mowed the fern from off the ridges
To get pig-bedding,
And with great care have nurtured hedges
Around my steading.

My sheds I've built with greatest pains,
And laid them off with paths and drains-
They're roofed with thatch and native cains
Well laced with flax
To shield my stock and keep the rains
From off their backs.

But woe is me my fate is hard,
For all my toil here's my reward,
Right through the cowshed in my yard
A full chain broad –
My foes agree with one accord
To make a road.

Alas! alas! when rogues combine,
Their tricks what mortal can divine?
Each artful dodge and dark design
Is past deduction.

And these have planned 'gainst me and mine

For our destruction.

So cursed be all the clan McCreman[47]

Who paint me blacker than a demon.

They may confer with Hay and Freeman

And beat me too

But though I swing as high as Hayman

They'll deeply rue.

May all the plagues of earth attend them

May fortune ne'er in life befriend them

Nor one day's joy nor pleasure lend them[48]

Among good fellows,

And may the law in justice end them

Upon the gallows.

But I've a friend down in the Taieri

Where hill-bred colts grow fat and fiery,

A grizzled Scotchman tough and wiry,

And staunch and sure,

And though his stockyard may be miry,

[47] There are slight variations to this poem. In the same MS 975/196 collection this name is spelled in another typewritten version as McCrimmon.

[48] In the same typewritten version referred to in the above footnote these three lines read:

"That rascal George, may ill attend him,
May Fortune ne'er in life befriend him
Nor one day's joy or pleasure lend him."

His heart is pure.

Tho' no one else bemoans my plight
Yet Wattie knows their craft and spite.
Hail Wattie! many a hearty night
We'll drown our cares;
But may Ould Erin's branchee [sic][49] blight
Both them and theirs.

MS 975/196

Spirits of Harmony, Music, and Love

In the elemental chaos
When the worlds were in the making
None could rule nor disobey us-
We were there in all partaking;
And we caught the rythmic [sic] motion
Of the orbs that roll and swing
In the vast ethereal ocean
Deep beyond all fathoming.

And our music rolled over the waters before
Their free-swelling billows were barred by a shore,

[49] In the other typewritten version referred to on p150 above this term is "banshee". The term "branchee" used here is probably a spelling mistake.

And we sang as we saw the earth leap from the main

And the plan of Creation before us made plain.

But it was our delight, when the earth in the pride

Of her sweet virgin beauty, in us did confide-

Then we rustled and played

Through her forests, and swayed

All the reeds and the brackens and bade them rejoice;

And the birds in their flight

When the sunshine was bright

Caught the sound of our music and each found a voice.

MS 975/196

The Vision

At Jimmie's hut we all had met[50]

The night was wintry wild and wet

But what cared we about the weather

We knew when thus we met together

An extempore from Charleys [sic] lyre

Could rouse a grand poetic fire

For Charley, when in proper tune

Could be a poet or buffoon.

[50] On the handwritten manuscript the original wording for this line was: "At Jimmie's shop the core had met". It was then changed to that which is quoted above. Although Archie also later crossed out "we all" also, he did not actually replace it with anything else. I have left it in purely for readibility. The punctuation throughout the poem has been preserved as written on the original manuscript.

A master he, in either art

Could shake the sides or melt the heart-

With songs of love could move a tear

Or could with sulpher [sic] scorch the ear

He was, nor wished he to be more

The leading spirit of the core.

But on the night in question he

Was worked up to his highest key

So were we all, as there with heart and soul

We did the flights of Byrons [sic] muse extol

Praised Robby Burns with fellow feeling true

Revelled in Hood and William Shakespeare too.

Our favourite bards received our loud applause

Or friendship glowed despising man-made laws

That regultates [sic] the hours when men shall meet

And part, if they are to be deemed discreet.

By those who are too prudent ever to know

Those powers that must uninterrupted flow.

And so the social hours went rolling on

Until the 'wee short hour' was all but gone

When Hugh at last, arose mid plaudits loud

To give us Shelley's poem on The Cloud

In his best style the piece he did deliver

Now soaring high now flowing like a river

But at the last line when about to cheer

We each beheld a glaming form appear

A phantom shape, which rose and seemed to glow

And oh those eyes, we could not help but know

All recognise, as full his face he turns

'Auld Scotlands' bard' the imortal [sic] Robbie Burns.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

He seemed unto our company quite used

Bowed and shook hands, then took himself a seat.

Jim offerd [sic] him a beer but he refused.

So next he offered him a whisky neat

Which he declined, and said "I've ne'er been boozed

On earthly drink, nor tasted earthly meat,

Now friend I think your comrades you've amused

I pray you press no farther on this beat,'

To which Jim curled his lip and gave a curse

And said 'If you are Burns you've [sic] altered for the worse.'

The sprite seemed nothing daunted by this volly [sic]

His face looked grave and just trifle colder

He said 'My friend I think you'll rue your folly

And deeply too, before you are much older,

And take your drop alone." Then smiling drolly

His face was changed to each amased [sic] beholder

There sat Tom Hood the punster gay and jolly

I knew his finely moulded head and shoulder

Then as we gased [sic] in wonder past expression

Our favourite bards appeared in quick succession.

For one brief moment only, each appeared

Yet wondrous things were written on their faces.-

Deep things, which until then had not been cleared

Unto our minds did now seem as a place is-

In which a man in early life is reared

(But exiled from for long 'mong forign [sic] races)

Familiar, and by absence more endeared.

As once again he visits and retraces

The haunts and happy scenes his childhood knew

And sees it all like some fair dream that has come true.

Fear left us now for there was naught appalling

In this strange vision of departed souls

Goldsmith was clear his smiles like moon beams falling

And Shelly [sic] like a meteor of the poles

Shakespeare, serene, deep, dreamy, and enthralling

And Byron like the sunsets burning coals

That cast their glow on infant rivers sprawling

Or gild the rocks and cliffs where ocean rolls.

Our hearts rejoiced now we inly knew

To <u>be</u> and <u>feel</u>, is higher than to strive to do.

The sprites were gone that late had passed before us.

No; somewhere near they still seemed hovering

At times beneath, at times high-floating o'er us

Or sweeping round on softly waving wing.

Then stole upon our ears a sweeter chorus

Than lips of clay as yet have learned to sing

And we were sure they did not quite ignore us;

Else we had never heard such music ring.

I can't translate the song;– its meaning here

I give, as unto me it strangely did appear.

MS 975/196

His voice it is the low vast tone

His voice it is the low vast tone

His eyes are deeper than the deeps

His hair that gives the night its name

Lies spread unto the outer steeps.

It trails through all Creation's length

And falls upon the last of space

He dwells within the heart of all

Yet none in full may know his face.

And in his hand he holds the cup

The golden cup of love's first wine

And to my soul he doth it press

That I may drink the life Divine

His voice it is the low vast one

That thrills Creation's ample halls

All music is his utterance

All wisdom dwells within his walls (?).

MS 704-A/12

Simons Town

Once more toward the western sea
The glorious sun goes down,
Once more he fires the granite spires
That look o'er Simons Town.
I watched him when at break of day
He rose with blood-red plume:
With shafts of light on many a height
He smote the shades of gloom
Where far and wide on every side
The heath and heather bloom.

The feathered tribes in bush and brake
Their gladsome matins sang,
With wings unfurled the insect world
To animation sprang;
The earth in magic beauty smiled
Beneath his mantling rays,
From hill to strand a fairy land
Gleamed through a pearly haze,
The gorgeous bay like saphire [sic] lay
Serene beneath his blaze.

The shrubs that to the water's edge
In such profusion grow, —

A wondrous sheen of evergreen
All bathed in his bright glow;
Wild flowers of every shade and hue
Like gems in lustre shone
From scalet [sic] bright to snowy white-
And now the day is done;
And now that sun my thoughts outrun,
My fancy far has flown.

Back to the land that gave me birth,
Along the leagues of foam—
A land that lies 'neath southern skies,
My far New Zealand home!
To where through gleaming flax and fern
The summer breezes play,
Where oft I've stood in raptest mood
Or onward held my way
Through woodland halls where water-falls
Leap down in showering spray.

There on the morning stillness breaks
The blithesome tui's song
From lofty pines and high woodbines
In music rich and strong;
While to the bellbirds' joyful choir
Each wooded bluff responds
And fantails wing and robins sing

Around the forest ponds

Where wild ducks shy in covert lie

And treeferns wave their fronds.

MS 975/196

Appendix II

Poems by James K. Baxter

The following is a selection of poems referred to in the main body of this thesis which have not, as yet, been quoted in full. Poems already quoted in their entirety in the text are not included in this appendix.

Peace

Why cannot war forever cease
And nations dwell in lasting Peace,
For Liberty's not gained by strife
And taking of a brother's life?
And our fathers knew not Right or Wrong
Save 'Strength shall always aid the Strong',
And we, tho high in Craft and Art,
We cannot bind a brother's heart
By ties of friendship, bonds of Love,
We follow not the Star above.
Let us fight on through every ill
With brother-love and steadfast will
And peaceful banners wide unfurled
Throughout the nations of the world.

The Brook

A little rippling living thing,
As down the hillside in the sun
A clear and splashing brook doth run.
In among the trees it courses,
Bubbling from its many sources.
Green trees over brown stones under,
Offspring of the storm and thunder.
(*Downward like cascades of silver.*)

Down in silvery cascades splashing,
Then along the rapids dashing;
Onward though the flow'ry bush
'Neath the big ferns it doth rush;
Swirling whirlpools now appear,
For the river's drawing near:
Then o'er a cascade it doth pour
To mingle with the river's roar.
(*Onward within the river it goes*
While (?) the elements its mortal foes)

The river and the brook are one
As all mankind should be;
The river runneth to the sea
And mankind to eternity.

We cleave the shore with fierce might,

For ever in the inceasing fight

Of elements at war . . . .

MS 704-A7:55-6

Hail to the Pacifist

Hail to the Pacifist! Hail to the harbinger, guiding Humanity onward to Peace

They who should bring to him praises unlimited, have they assisted him? Nay! They have not.

War and calamity, evil and anarchy – death of prosperity – when shall they cease?

Hark to the Pacifist! Hark to his doctrine now: 'Yours is Prosperity, warring forgot.'

MS 704/A-1

Summary

Men murder for a form of government,

New policies are ever in the mint –

Emblazoned banners guide us to the pit

And politicians of far-heard repute

Hail with loud shouts the war-cry of the mode;

I ask the dreary question long since made:

"Am I the sole sane in a world gone mad?"

Mine is no stern religion grey and stark
That seeks the tender rule of some King Stork (?)
Nor yet am I a dutiful worker-bee
From most communal governments to buy
The wax that lines my snug hexagonal tomb
(If all the world is communist in time[51]
Then I perhaps, refusing to behave,
Will be thrown out the entrance of the hive
With bitter stumps of wings and belly thin
For individual free existence then.

Is there no kinder(?) faith that we can find
Than proletariat government so feigned –
For these, the capitalists, are friendly men
And they will so remain
When a starved world has found the faith it needs.

The brain of inspiration reels and nods –
So must the voice of song, a needle-point,
Turn it to power bent
And loose the forces long since pent.

MS 704-A/4:157-8

[51] There is no closing bracket here. The large brackets on the last two stanzas have been preserved as written in the manuscript notebook.

Poem included in letter to Lawrence Baigent
25 June 1945

At cell and bull-ring
In winter warring France the warders had their fun
making the magnificent australians [sic]
jump like automatons and eat their own excreta.

Be sure, they said to those tormented men
You have not loved the dark trees of explosion
Nor that red grass
Whose roots are human veins.

How shall I tell you
how soft my heart is for the swearing man? –
who has not yet found crystal of defeat
nor sold his birthright for his own excreta.

MS 699, Macmillan Brown Library

On Visiting a Gallery of War Pictures

Enter and pause. Here are white walls
Refurnished by a thousand errant wills
Who formulated line on mental line
The image of men living, slain,
Of war-encumbered landscape of old towns

And armoured cruisers many tons:

All this wide thought is concentrated here –

There is a strange hush of mute words on the air.

Here are huge steel propellors [sic] finely wrought,

Perfectly balanced – to my sight

They are chill pieces in a vast machine,

Evil and strong; these accurate men

Who move adjusting firm bolts cautiously

Are moulded to a make as low,

That sees no far horizons dawn-enscrolled

Nor beauty even in their silver-hulled

Grey planes that take fierce hold on atmospheres

And blot with billowing smoke the morning fires.

Move on – peer low at this small daub:

Here shielded workers strike and grab

At glowing iron serpents. Helmeted,

Slow craftsmen pour a fiery flood

Of molten steel through channelled tracks – and these,

The artisans care not if the flame that flows

Blasts hell from booming throats or splinters down

To slash live agonising flesh and bone

But bend obedient heads to chains and bars

Nor heed if lordlings loose a hundred wars.

Gargantuan girders twisted in close shapes,

Piled on the rubble of wrecked shops,
A cabinet-factory was ere swift bombs fell.
So human destinies must fail,
Broken and tangled, at the clash of gods.
Aye! bow to the eternal goods
Of circumstance, fell circumstance;
Suffer the sharp calamity that stuns.
Kneel long in blind idolatry
And ye shall rise entirely free!

See now the crowded bulwarks of a transport
Where khaki soldiers waiting their depart
Shout and sing in chorus joyfully:
To them the horrors of bleak war is lie
And they are heros [sic] in a high romance.
When they find what battle truly means –
Where death lurks not but ravens day by day
And men die not to live but live to die –
Shall they retain their youthful ardour long
When stark steel pierces body, brain, or lung?

Yonder the bastions of a broken nave
Where faded murals yet adorn smashed walls;
The waters of calm twilight lave
Battered devout receptacles.
On the high altar burst the hand-grenade
And desecrated is the sanctuary;

Above the shattered window, undismayed,

The crucifix – calm, bitter irony!

When forth from the waste land sweeps the war-wind drear

Naught but the husks of faith shall now endure.

And here is a symbol of humanity

That strives to hold a close civilian tie,

To carry in battle the ways of home:

Here where the sea-plane's engines hum

Behold a 'Sergeant Wireless Operator'

With vital face above the instrument board:

Yet even the strongest heart must tire,

And from life's intricacies barred

He will soon lose full human intercourse

And sink beneath the internecine curse.

Regards cadets intent upon their drill,

Though they may men-like speak with shout and drawl

They have no thought of discipline of war

Where shelled men struggle in barbed wire

And writhe with maimed limbs through entanglement.

They are self-confident;

And dream of heroism, of brave deeds,

The awe bequeathed to wondering decades:

They march in wheeling squads on green grass-lawn

Nor see – above – the lowering skies of doom.

A great sea-battle. Burning ships drift by
And twelve-inch guns roar out across the bay:
But fifty-cannon cruisers are slight pawns
To cabinets with diplomatic pains;
And Man, the unit, has no place in schemes
Where empires shamble through belligerent shams.
The patient sweating mortals are the same
On either side. Why bring blunt death to some –
Drown, blast with fire from stem to stern?
In similar unreason they return.

Come hither – look long and steadily at this!
The naked soul of war exhibited thus.
'Air-gunner in gun-turret at night'—
He is held close and comprehendeth not
The glittering stars like Christmas candlelight.
This, the glass coffin, poised in middle air
Shows the true battle – spirits as they are;
This pallid death's-head, ringed by iron bands
Is held in inexorable bonds:
Who knows how soon
Death lancing from a search-light sun
Shall hold the silver fish transfixedly?-
And death-flame lunge across a reeling sky.

Herein is shown the blind insanity
Of reason subjugate to formulas:

They have small intellect to lose,

Counting high explosive human toys-

Mine-laying where the thundering seas roll by.

And mines marked not by flag or buoy?

What vessel strikes on these?

We will win wars by terrorizing those

Who move in ships on the uncertain seas

And bear food-cargoes whither the enemy says –

In truth to the blockaded states

Where a starved people waits:

'Nation of fiends!'

Yet they are saints if friends.

The maniac sadists loose death-dealing bombs

Above the English cities, then return.

And who inhabit these ships of twenty tons

That from a black sky boom their battle-theme?

Man, kindly men – words not re-iterated

By those who see foul monsters slink,

And hasten home, their fury sated.

Here the night-raider slips in blank

Slow passage on across the estuary channel –;

The moon, as if emerging from a tunnel

Glows through frozen cloud –

Bird-tracks upon a way steel-clad.

And far below the pencilled search-lights swing

While fearing human life moves on,

Labour accomplished, longing for safe earth

Where stars of welcome flicker to the south.

Evening: the twilight lowers on a darkened cliff;

Beyond, huge rollers crash incessantly.

And here the plane that hovered silently

Aloof

Lies buried in disrupted loam;

Here corpses scorched by flame.

And all strife herein is shown –

The clay where warm vitality once shone,

The intricate machine destroyed,

Swallowed in souless [sic] mud.

And the wide sea that so will batter still

When self-destroying gods have wrought their will.

MS 704-A/5: 34-42

Such Shall Not Be

"Such shall not be again

Horror is gone

    We may live lightly as before

Nor dream of day-sun setting:

These are garrulous fools inciting

    Us to fear

Who have learned bleak lesson

From terror-lesion

When earthquake shook the cities afar

In cataclysmic war."

Hither is the ancient night:

We hearkened not

And slaughter rises from no cause

Save warped unnatural living;

Dead is the necessary loving

And silent quays

Shelter night-mare being

Blind spirit knowing

Only extinction in sure guise

Breaking from bloody skies.

89-148

Boys Laugh at Ease

Boys laugh at ease

Upon the rising seas;

Young bulls in the spring season

Will butt at sapling trees.

The stirring of the blood

Comes even in trench-mud,

Wins for especial daring

A cross of bronze or wood.

Old men less wise
Control the enterprise:
  Old men can see uncaring
Lost limbs or blinded eyes.

These who have scarcely seen
The sapling wood shoot green
  Are killed before the branches
Have shed their summer sheen.

Young men sleep well,
Wake to the crash of shell;
  Old men dream of the tempest
Ringing a winter knell.

When all are dead
Then be no prayer said
  Save: Youth among the cannons
Sought life, encountered lead.

MS 704-A/8:67-8

Spirit of God

Spirit of God Thy Might
Controls the wavering flight
Of the young bird just left the nest,
Thou knowest what for him is best.

Thou stirrest the earth in titanic revolts
Which swallow those fools and wondering dolts
Who pray unto thee in cathedral and church
But in danger leave their friends in the lurch.

Thy blue ethereal kingdom stretches far,
For up to many an undiscovered star,
Where flaming meteors hiss and swing
More free than any earthly king.

Yet all are bound by one accord
In one stupendous heavenly mind
So universal and so kind.

MS 704-A/7:57-8

The Bell

The slow bell broke my morning solitude:
And I who hearkened found myself firm tied
By bonds of ancestry to ancient rules
And all whereon a modern freedom rails.

Yet thought I, "Here are shadows of dead flesh
Not the clear human feature quick to flush,
And shall our faith know only withered seeds
With Death's dark menace on all sides? –
For fault is in soul-sparsity and dearth
When worship is the diadem of Death.[52]

"O captives voiceless, rise and view the sun
That shineth sweetly to a spirit sane:
Flee not from beauty to a stormy creed
While year by year the winds of earth have cried
That ye should greet them with a pagan joy
And bathe grey bodies in the golden dew.

It is not thus that ye should worship Him
Where honey-bees forget their gladsome hum,
But from the drugged self-gnawing dream awake
To know the marvel of his handiwork.
And interpose no barrier to the skies,
The sunlight and the rain's incessant kiss
But view beyond a shining summer sea

[52] There is no closing punctuation for this stanza on the original manuscript. However, as new quotation marks begin the next stanza and close at the end of it, I will assume that this stanza closes likewise.

The prophecy he spake who loved ye so."

But ah! the slow bell tolled and men moved on
Toward the sunless narrow house wherein
They cry to the Lord of the flowering vine!

For ancient evils there is no redress
Till Time shall crumble them to dross.

MS 704-A/5:6-7

Burns

Where rests the spirit of poor Robbie Burns
    Or is his ghost for ever laid
        Who knew
The red-faced lasses at their milking churns
    And frosty mornings when the clear aubade
        Of one remaining lark fired him anew –
Whole notes like snow-flakes fell to the heaving plough.
Where is he now?

In this new age he still may wander

Where townsmen notice not the lonely wraith

Bewildered, yet feeling bitter pride

To see the wealth that mortals squander

Building memorials to the man

Whom they erstwhile denied.

And he will stop by tavern window-sills,

Knowing himself firm barred from warmth and jollity

Where drunkards dignified inflate their tattered wills

And even beggars are free:

Not envious, but long unsatisfied.

And the old restlessness will rise

That rebelled though Church's word was law –

I see the man whom dominies never saw

For he who carries a fire in the heart and eyes

Shall have strong doubts that gnaw.

Thus have I seen him stand,

A restless ghost upon an Ayreshire [sic] hill –

Thus shall I see him still:

Grasping the heavens but found close to earth

Too strong in passion for a bloodless land;

He, diademed with stars, of peasant birth.

Aye, his hot soul flares out

In the most simple of things

As once in most uproarious drinking-bout

His 'Pegasus' might not have wings,

Yet 'twas a fiery nag without a doubt.

MS 704-A/5:90-2[53]

Death

The cynics wail for death

And Death will come –

As melts the cold snow-wreath

The body, dumb,

Shall it fall to the earth from whence

It came ere this?

Shall the sad soul hurrying hence

Flee to the black abyss?

I would not live for long

If I were frail and old

When the bleak skies sing no song

And the days are cold,

But I can feel in me

A life predestinate

[53] This particular "Burns" poem is a different one to that which Paul Millar has included in the post-humously published collection *James K Baxter: Cold Spring* (Auckland: Oxford University press, 1996).

That knows its immortality

And bows not to the hand of Fate!

Aye, Death shall tryst with me:

When I have run my race

I shall greet him courteously

And face to face;

Knowing that all must fade

Shall I pass the gates of night,

And wholly unafraid

Shall breast the blinding light.

MS 704-A/1:117-8

The Poetic State

'How is it,' I was asked 'to be a poet?'

And since the question had been simply put

There were no suave evasions on my part.

The title does not rouse me to emotion.

I see no virtue in bland deprecation,

The 'I, sir? No, you flatter me' tradition.

Poetry is, I said, my father's trade,

Familiar since my childhood; I have tried
Always to annul the curse of that grim triad

Which holds it death to mock and leave a poet
In mockery, death likewise to love a poet,
But death above all deaths to live a poet.

I will not see myself the desolate bard,
His natural friendships cast and his loves buried,
Auguring doom like some black carrion bird.

I seek no strength in the well-formed cabala,
In runic practice or loud alleluiah,
In conference with spirits high or low.

But mocked, I see my weakness in that mocking,
And loved, I charge myself with that love-making.
Nor am I marked with beast's or angel's marking.

89-148

Glencoe

See the grey glen, sword-gush among high hills
Cloud-corniced, from whose clefts the snow-winds beat
Or in the days of summer falls the sweet
And flowering-awaking rain.

Within these citadels

The gods perchance once dwelt – the gods long-dead

Who ruled these isles amid the years of peace

Without beginning.

Weary with surcease

Of death and famine, men have ever fled

Among such glens and chasms steep

For refuge, and at length eternal sleep.

But what of souls who dwell from childhood thus?

Knowing that but a stone's thickness divides them

From the shrill piping wind that hums beside them:

They are upon the brink of life, and feel

Most intimately dear the humble sheiling [sic];

For them the gale, for them the thunder-peal

The giant hills athwart the high cloud-ceiling

Are powers that awe them, that bid them turn

To the wild foray, the swift chase at morn,

To the cottage-fire and the din of the nearby burn.

Sound of slow piping wakes the nether glen.

Huge and bald-buttressed, the winter hills

Bear on their brows the drifting winter snow;

But, in the depth of winter, one clear day

Has thawed the frost from the cottage-sills

And bade the lakes, rain-brilliant, shine below.

Hear, on the rocks, the tramp of marching men

That weary amid the heather make their way.

And in the Highland village cries of welcome:

Welcome for the kinsmen.

Merry-hearted

Youths and maidens free and laughing

Lead even the unknown soldier to the fire-side.

Good wives set out their provender,

Girdle-cakes and foreign brandy.

E'en enemies break bread together;

And, in the night, sheltered from bitter weather

Slept safe on the beads of heather.

So day by day held they festivities:

The good hosts eager that their guests should be

Happy, at ease. In mirth and amity

They ran and wrestled; while, at eventide

The old men tuned their pipes with pride,

And songs and piobaireachds[54] resounded;

The dancers flung and bounded,

The young unthinking

In laughter and drinking

Of bloody feuds long-past at last struck dead.

.....

Then storm-clouds gathered in the sullen heavens,

[54] While many of the words in this poem are obviously of Scottish origin, I have been unable to find the meaning of this particular term.

Wind from the north-east whining through the gullies –

Even the sturdy bare-legged gillies

Grew cold in the bitter wind.

A child come home at the darkening

Told of a musing soldier

Slapping his hand on a hill-boulder

And saying: 'Grey stone of the glen,

Great is your right to be here.

But knew ye what will happen this night

Ye would be up and away.'

Air dark with foreboding,

Slept the young men uneasily.

Then at the dawn

The aged chieftain, called from sleeping

Shot in the head and body.

Friends nearby

Coming into the grey winter morning

At sound of shots, killed also. The chieftain's wife,

Who set but lately to them their provender,

Rings torn by teeth from her fingers.

Men shot by their fires-

Save one, who flung his plaid in the soldiers' faces

And fled to the snow-clad screes. Boys, women, and old men

Dead by their burning houses, snow for a blanket.

Boys clung to their murderers' knees – knees that perchance

And served them as seats by the fireside –

Pistolled for their pains. Fugitives in the snow

Met musket-volleys. The houses burned, and plundered

For pitiful trinkets.

At dawn in the blackened valley

Only the vultures from winter corries

And from afar the high pipes screeling –

'The Glen is Mine.'

Snow falls on the grey mountains

Or summer birds build in the glen.

No men shall rear (?) again these walls

Yet grass has not grown over them:

No life but the innocent deer here cometh

None shall rebuild these walls

Yet grass had not grown over them.

MS 704-A/9

The Helmeted

They helmeted march by

Who have scant thought of death

The ignorant head held high

Proud limbs and easy breath.

Spoke one aware of death:

'They are too young to die.'

Unhelmeted they lie

Where earth groans loud with death;

The charge has passed them by;

Torn limbs and blood-choked breath.

Moaned one desiring death:

'I am too old to die!'

MS 704-A/10:169

The Garden

I saw a garden, in a wilderness,

Walled round with massive battlements and towers,

Where the bright blooming of a thousand flowers

Beamed on the sunny air; and odorous

The spices borne upon a gentle breeze

That touched the lake and stirred the willow trees

And wafted through the columns ponderous.

And there were men who walked among the groves,

Who breathed the fragrance of the summer air;

But on their brows was sealed the mark of care-

They found no peace in that Elysium;

And ever through some scarce-perceivèd door

New mortals joined the mingled multitude,

And by their bearing I could see that some

Still in their souls a fading glory bore;

And some were wrapped in care-worn solitude,

Who slipped away and then returned no more:

Then at each fresh departure those who stayed

Within that garden prison close confined

Caught some dim glimpse of regions yet unknown,

The regions of the spirit and the mind-

For one brief instant then the scales fell down

From their blind eyes; and they could see

The beauty that unnurtured round them lay;

From their lethargic care they set them free:

So then they tilled the leafy soil

And decked the garden by their toil

Until they found their peace in labouring.

MS 704-A/2:10-11

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